A GERMAN DESERTER'S WAR EXPERIENCE

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PREFACE

THE author of this book, who escaped from Germany and military service after fourteen months of fighting in France, is an intelligent young miner. He does not wish to have his name made public, fearing that those who will be offended by his frankness might vent their wrath on his relatives. Since his arrival in America his friends and acquaintances have come to know him as an upright and truthful man whose word can be relied upon.

The vivid description of the life of a common German soldier in the present war aroused great interest when the story presented in these pages to the English-speaking reader was published in serial form. For here was an historian of the war who had been through the horrors of the carnage as one of the "Huns," one of the "Boches"; a soldier who had not abdicated his reason; a warrior against his will, who nevertheless had to conform to the etiquette of war; a hater of militarism for whom there was no romance in war, but only butchery and brutality, grime and vermin, inhuman toil and degradation. Moreover, he was found to be no mean observer of men and things. His

technical training at a school of mining enabled him to obtain a much clearer understanding of the war of position than the average soldier possesses.

Most soldiers who have been in the war and have written down their experiences have done so in the customary way, never questioning for a moment the moral justification of war. Not so our author. He could not persuade his conscience to make a distinction between private and public morality, and the angle from which he views the events he describes is therefore entirely different from that of other actual observers of and participators in war. His story also contains the first German description of the retreat of the Teutonic armies after the battle of the Marne. The chief value of this soldier's narrative lies, however, in his destructive, annihilating criticism of the romance and fabled virtues of war. If some of the incidents related in this book appear to be treated too curtly it is solely due to the author's limited literary powers. If, for instance, he does not dwell upon his inner experiences during his terrible voyage to America in the coal bunker of a Dutch ship it is because he is not a literary artist, but a simple workman.

The translator hopes that he has succeeded in reproducing faithfully the substance and the spirit of the story, and that this little book will contribute

in combating one of the forces that make for war —popular ignorance of war's realities. Let each individual fully grasp and understand the misery, degradation, and destruction that await him in war, and the barbarous ordeal by carnage will quickly become the most unpopular institution on earth.

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I

MARCHING INTO BELGIUM

At the end of July, 1914, our garrison at Coblenz was feverishly agitated. Part of our men were seized by an indescribable enthusiasm, others became subject to a feeling of great depression. The declaration of war was in the air. I belonged to those who were depressed. For I was doing my second year of military service and was to leave the barracks in six weeks' time. Instead of the long-wished-for return home war was facing me.

Also during my military service I had remained the anti-militarist I had been before. I could not imagine what interest I could have in the mass-murder, and I also pointed out to my comrades that under all circumstances war was the greatest misfortune that could happen to humanity.

Our sapper battalion, No. 30, had been in feverish activity five days before the mobilisation; work was being pushed on day and night, so that we were already fully prepared for war on July 23, and

on July 30 there was no person in our barracks who doubted that war would break out. Moreover, there was the suspicious amiability of the officers and sergeants, which excluded any doubt that any one might still have had. Officers who had never before replied to the salute of a private soldier now did so with the utmost attention. Cigars and beer were distributed in those days by the officers with great, uncommon liberality, so that it was not surprising that many soldiers were scarcely ever sober and did not realise the seriousness of the situation. But there were also others. There were men who, in those times of good humour and the grinning comradeship of officer and soldier, could not forget that in military service they had often been degraded to the level of brutes, and who now thought with bitter feelings that an opportunity might perhaps be offered in order to settle accounts.

The order of mobilisation became known on August 1, and the following day was decided upon as the real day of mobilisation. But without awaiting the arrival of the reserves we left our garrison town on August 1. Who was to be our "enemy" we did not know; Russia was for the present the only country against which war had been declared.

We marched through the streets of the town to

the station between crowds of people numbering many thousands. Flowers were thrown at us from every window; everybody wanted to shake hands with the departing soldiers. All the people, even soldiers, were weeping. Many marched arm in arm with wife or sweetheart. The music played songs of leave-taking. People cried and sang at the same time. Entire strangers, men and women, embraced and kissed each other; men embraced men and kissed each other. It was a real witches' Sabbath of emotion; like a wild torrent, that emotion carried away the whole assembled humanity. Nobody, not even the strongest and most determined spirit, could resist that ebullition of feeling.

But all that was surpassed by the taking leave at the station, which we reached after a short march. Here final adieux had to be said, here the separation had to take place. I shall never forget that leave-taking, however old I may grow to be. Desperately many women clung to their men; some had to be removed by force. Just as if they had suddenly had a vision of the fate of their beloved ones, as if they were beholding the silent graves in foreign lands in which those poor nameless ones were to be buried, they sought to cling fast to their possession, to retain what already no longer belonged to them.

Finally that, too, was over. We had entered a train that had been kept ready, and had made ourselves comfortable in our cattle-trucks. Darkness had come, and we had no light in our comfortable sixth-class carriages.

The train moved slowly down the Rhine, it went along without any great shaking, and some of us were seized by a worn-out feeling after those days of great excitement. Most of the soldiers lay with their heads on their knapsacks and slept. Others, again, tried to pierce the darkness as if attempting to look into the future ; still others stealthily drew a photo out of their breast-pocket, and only a very small number of us spent the time by debating our point of destination. Where are we going ? Well, where ? Nobody knew. At last, after long, infinitely long hours the train came to a stop. After a night of quiet slow riding we were at—Aix-la-Chapelle ! At Aix-la-Chapelle ! What were we doing at Aix-la-Chapelle ? We did not know, and the officers only shrugged their shoulders when we asked them.

After a short interval the journey proceeded, and on the evening of August 2 we reached a farm in the neighbourhood of the German and Belgian frontier, near Herbesthal. Here our company was quartered in a barn. Nobody knew what our business was at the Belgian frontier. In the

afternoon of August 3 reservists arrived, and our company was brought to its war strength. We had still no idea concerning the purpose of our being sent to the Belgian frontier, and that evening we lay down on our bed of straw with a forced tranquillity of mind. Something was sure to happen soon, to deliver us from that oppressive uncertainty. How few of us thought that for many it would be the last night to spend on German soil!

A subdued signal of alarm fetched us out of our "beds" at three o'clock in the morning. The company assembled, and the captain explained to us the war situation. He informed us that we had to keep ready to march, that he himself was not yet informed about the direction. Scarcely half an hour later fifty large traction motors arrived and stopped in the road before our quarters. But the drivers of these wagons, too, knew no particulars and had to wait for orders. The debate about our nearest goal was resumed. The orderlies, who had snapped up many remarks of the officers, ventured the opinion that we would march into Belgium the very same day; others contradicted them. None of us could know anything for certain. But the order to march did not arrive, and in the evening all of us could lie down again on our straw. But it was a short rest. At one o'clock in the morning an alarm aroused us again, and the captain honoured

us with an address. He told us we were at war with Belgium, that we should acquit ourselves as brave soldiers, earn iron crosses, and do honour to our German name. Then he continued somewhat as follows: "We are making war only against the armed forces, that is, the Belgian army. The lives and property of civilians are under the protection of international treaties, international law, but you soldiers must not forget that it is your duty to defend your lives as long as possible for the protection of your Fatherland, and to sell them as dearly as possible. We want to prevent useless shedding of blood as far as the civilians are concerned, but I want to remind you that a too great considerateness borders on cowardice, and cowardice in face of the enemy is punished very severely."

After that "humane" speech by our captain we were "laden" into the automobiles, and crossed the Belgian frontier on the morning of August 5. In order to give special solemnity to that "historical" moment we had to give three cheers.

At no other moments have the fruits of military education presented themselves more clearly before my mind. The soldier is told "The Belgian is your enemy," and he has to believe it. The soldier, the workman in uniform, had not known till then who was his enemy. If they had told us "The Hollander is your enemy," we would have

believed that too ; we would have been compelled to believe it, and would have shot him by order. We, the "German citizens in uniform," must not have an opinion of our own, must have no thoughts of our own, for they give us our enemy and our friend according to requirements, according to the requirements of their own interests. The Frenchman, the Belgian, the Italian is your enemy. Never mind, shoot as we order, and do not bother your head about it. You have duties to perform, perform them, and for the rest—cut it out !

Those were the thoughts that tormented my brain when crossing the Belgian frontier. And to console myself, and so as to justify before my own conscience the murderous trade that had been thrust upon me, I tried to persuade myself that though I had no Fatherland to defend, I had to defend a home and protect it from devastation. But it was a weak consolation, and did not even outlast the first few days.

Travelling in the fairly quick motor-cars we reached, towards eight o'clock in the morning, our preliminary destination, a small but pretty village. The inhabitants of the villages which we had passed stared at us in speechless astonishment, so that we all had the impression that those peasants for the most part did not know why we had come to

Belgium. They had been roused from their sleep and, half dressed, they gazed from their windows after our automobiles. After we had stopped and alighted, the peasants of that village came up to us without any reluctance, offered us food, and brought us coffee, bread, meat, etc. As the field-kitchen had not arrived we were glad to receive those kindly gifts of the "enemy," the more so because those fine fellows absolutely refused any payment. They told us the Belgian soldiers had left, for where they did not know.

After a short rest we continued our march and the motor-cars went back. We had scarcely marched for an hour when cavalry, dragoons and huzzars, overtook us and informed us that the Germans were marching forward in the whole neighbourhood, and that cyclist companies were close on our heels. That was comforting news, for we no longer felt lonely and isolated in this strange country. Soon after the troop of cyclists really came along. It passed us quickly and left us by ourselves again. Words of anger were to be heard now; all the others were able to ride, but we had to walk. What we always had considered as a matter of course was now suddenly felt by us to be a great injustice. And though our scolding and anger did not help us in the least, it turned our thoughts from the heaviness of the

" monkey " (knapsack), which rested like a leaden weight on our backs.

The heat was oppressive, the perspiration issued from every pore ; the new and hard leather straps, the new stiff uniforms rubbed against many parts of the body and made them sore, especially round the waist. Therefore with great joy we hailed the order that came at two o'clock in the afternoon to halt before an isolated farm and rest in the grass.

II

FIGHTING IN BELGIUM

About ten minutes we might have lain in the grass when we suddenly heard rifle-shots in front of us. Electrified, all of us jumped up and hastened to our rifles. Then the firing of rifles that was going on at a distance of about a mile or a mile and a half began steadily to increase in volume. We set in motion immediately.

The expression and the behaviour of the soldiers betrayed that something was agitating their mind, that an emotion had taken possession of them which they could not master and had never experienced before. On myself I could observe a great restlessness. Fear and curiosity threw my thoughts into a wild jumble; my head was swimming, and everything seemed to press upon my heart. But I wished to conceal my fears from my comrades. I know I tried to with a will, but whether I succeeded better than my comrades, whose uneasiness I could read in their faces, I doubt very much.

Though I was aware that we should be in the firing-line within half an hour, I endeavoured to convince myself that our participation in the fight would no longer be necessary. I clung obstinately, nay, almost convulsively, to every idea that could strengthen that hope or give me consolation. That not every bullet finds its billet; that, as we had been told, most wounds in modern wars were inflicted by grazing shots which caused slight flesh-wounds; those were some of the reiterated self-deceptions indulged in against my better knowledge. And they proved effective. It was not only that they made me in fact feel more easy; deeply engaged in those thoughts I had scarcely observed that we were already quite near the firing-line.

The bicycles at the side of the road revealed to us that the cyclist corps were engaged by the enemy. We did not know, of course, the strength of our opponents as we approached the firing-line in leaps. In leaping forward every one bent down instinctively, whilst to our right and left and behind us the enemy's bullets could be heard striking; yet we reached the firing-line without any casualties and were heartily welcomed by our hard-pressed friends. The cyclists, too, had not yet suffered any losses; some, it is true, had already been slightly wounded, but they could continue to participate in the fight.

We were lying flat on the ground, and fired in the direction indicated to us as fast as our rifles would allow. So far we had not seen our opponents. That, it seemed, was too little interesting to some of our soldiers; so they partly rose, and fired in a kneeling position. Two men of my company had to pay their curiosity with their lives. Almost at one and the same time they were shot through the head. The first victim of our group fell down forward without uttering a sound; the second threw up his arms and fell on his back. Both of them were dead instantly.

Who could describe the feelings that overcome a man in the first real hail of bullets he is in? When we were leaping forward to reach the firing-line I no longer felt any fear and seemed only to try to reach the line as quickly as possible. But when looking at the first dead man I was seized by a terrible horror. For minutes I was perfectly stupefied, had completely lost command over myself, and was absolutely incapable of thinking or acting. I pressed my face and hands firmly against the ground, and then suddenly I was seized by an irrepressible excitement, took hold of my gun, and began to fire away blindly. Little by little I quieted down again somewhat, nay, I became almost quite confident, as if everything were normal. Suddenly I found myself content with myself and

my surroundings, and when a little later the whole line was commanded, "Leap forward! March, march!" I ran forward, demented, like the others, as if things could not be other than what they were. The order, "Position!" followed, and we flopped down like wet bags. Firing had begun again.

Our firing became more lively from minute to minute, and grew into a rolling, deafening noise. If in such an infernal noise you want to make yourself understood by your neighbour, you have to shout at him so that it hurts your throat. The effect of our firing caused our opponent to grow unsteady; his fire became weaker; the line of the enemy began to waver. Being separated from the enemy by only about 500 yards, we could observe exactly what was happening there. We saw how about half of the men opposing us were drawn back. The movement is executed by taking back every second man whilst number one stays on until the retiring party has halted. We took advantage of that movement to inflict the severest losses possible on our retreating opponent. As far as we could survey the country to our right and left we observed that the Germans were pressing forward at several points. Our company, too, received the order to advance when the enemy took back all his forces.

Our task was to cling obstinately to the heels of the retreating enemy so as to leave him no time

to collect his forces and occupy new positions. We therefore followed him in leaps with short breathing pauses so as to prevent him in the first place from establishing himself in the village before him. We knew that otherwise we should have to engage in costly street fighting. But the Belgians did not attempt to establish themselves, but disengaged themselves from us with astonishing skill.

Meanwhile we had been reinforced. Our company had been somewhat dispersed, and everybody marched with the troop he chanced to find himself with. My troop had to stay in the village to search every house systematically for soldiers who had been dispersed or hidden. During that work we noticed that the Germans were marching forward from all directions. Field artillery, machine-gun sections, etc., arrived, and all of us wondered whence all of this came so quickly.

There was, however, no time for long reflections. With fixed bayonets we went from house to house, from door to door, and though the harvest was very meagre, we were not turned away quite empty-handed, as the inhabitants had to deliver up all privately owned fire-arms, ammunition, etc. The chief functionary of the village, who accompanied us, had to explain to every citizen that the finding of arms after the search would lead to punish-

ment by court-martial. And court-martial means—death.

After another hour had passed we were alarmed again by rifle- and gun-firing; a new battle had begun. Whether the artillery was in action on both sides could not be determined from the village, but the noise was loud enough, for the air was almost trembling with the rumbling, rolling, and growling of the guns, which steadily increased in strength. The ambulance columns were bringing in the first wounded; orderly officers whizzed past us. War had begun with full intensity.

Darkness was falling before we had finished searching all the houses. We dragged mattresses, sacks of straw, feather beds, whatever we could get hold of, to the public school and the church where the wounded were to be accommodated. They were put to bed as well as it could be done. Those first victims of the horrible massacre of nations were treated with touching care. Later on, when we had grown more accustomed to those horrible sights, less attention was paid to the wounded.

The first fugitives now arrived from the neighbouring villages. They had probably walked for many an hour, for they looked tired, absolutely exhausted. There were women, old, white-haired men, and children, all mixed together, who had not been able to save anything but their poor lives.

In a perambulator or a push-cart those unfortunate beings carried away all that the brutal force of war had left them. In marked contrast to the fugitives we had hitherto met, these people were filled with the utmost fear, shivering with fright, terror-stricken in face of the hostile world. As soon as they beheld one of us soldiers they were seized with such a fear that they seemed to crumple up. How different they were from the inhabitants of the village in which we were, who showed themselves kind, friendly, and even obliging towards us. We tried to find out the cause of that fear, and heard that those fugitives had witnessed bitter street fighting in their village. They had experienced war, had seen their houses burnt, their simple belongings perish, and had not yet been able to forget their streets filled with dead and wounded soldiers. It became clear to us that it was not fear alone that made these people look like the hunted quarry; it was hatred, hatred against us, the invaders, who, as they had to suppose, had fallen upon them unawares, had driven them from their homes.

We marched away that very evening and tried to reach our section. When darkness fell the Belgians had concentrated still farther to the rear; they were already quite near the fortress of Liége. Many of the villages we passed were in flames; the inhabitants who had been driven away passed

us in crowds ; there were women whose husbands were perhaps also defending their " Fatherland," children, old men who were pushed hither and thither, and seemed to be always in the way. Without any aim, any plan, any place in which they could rest, those processions of misery and unhappiness crept past us—the best illustration of man-murdering, nation-destroying war ! Again we reached a village which to all appearances had once been inhabited by a well-to-do people, by a contented little humanity. There were nothing but ruins now, burnt, destroyed houses and farm buildings, dead soldiers, German and Belgian, and among them several civilians who had been shot by sentence of the court-martial.

Towards midnight we reached the German line which was trying to get possession of a village which was already within the fortifications of Liége, and was obstinately defended by the Belgians. Here we had to employ all our forces to wrench from our opponent house after house, street after street. It was not yet completely dark, so that we had to go through that terrible struggle which developed with all our senses awake and receptive. It was a hand-to-hand fight ; every kind of weapon had to be employed ; the opponent was attacked with the butt-end of the rifle, the knife, the fist, and the teeth. One of my best friends fought with

a gigantic Belgian ; both had lost their rifles. They were pummelling each other with their fists. I had just finished with a Belgian who was about twenty-two years of age, and was going to assist my friend, as the Herculean Belgian was so much stronger than he. Suddenly my friend succeeded with a lightning motion in biting the Belgian in the chin. He bit so deeply that he tore away a piece of flesh with his teeth. The pain the Belgian felt must have been immense, for he let go his hold and ran off screaming with terrible pain.

All that happened in seconds. The blood of the Belgian ran out of my friend's mouth ; he was seized by a horrible nausea, an indescribable terror, the taste of the warm blood nearly drove him insane. That young, gay, lively fellow of twenty-four had been cheated out of his youth in that night. He used to be the jolliest among us ; after that we could never induce him even to smile.

Whilst fighting during the night I came for the first time in touch with the butt-end of a Belgian rifle. I had a hand-to-hand fight with a Belgian when another one from behind hit me with his rifle on the head with such force that it drove my head into the helmet up to my ears. I experienced a terrific pain all over my head, doubled up, and lost consciousness. When I revived I found myself

with a bandaged head in a barn among other wounded.

I had not been severely wounded, but I felt as if my head was double its normal size, and there was a noise in my ears as of the wheels of an express engine.

The other wounded and the soldiers of the ambulance corps said that the Belgians had been pushed back to the fortress; we heard, however, that severe fighting was still going on. Wounded soldiers were being brought in continuously, and they told us that the Germans had already taken in the first assault several fortifications like outer forts, but that they had not been able to maintain themselves because they had not been sufficiently provided with artillery. The defended places and works inside the forts were still practically completely intact, and so were their garrisons. The forts were not yet ripe for assault, so that the Germans had to retreat with downright enormous losses. The various reports were contradictory, and it was impossible to get a clear idea of what was happening.

Meanwhile the artillery had begun to bombard the fortress, and even the German soldiers were terror-stricken at that bombardment. The heaviest artillery was brought into action against the modern forts of concrete. Up to that time no

soldier had been aware of the existence of the 42-centimetre mortars. Even when Liége had fallen into German hands we soldiers could not explain to ourselves how it was possible that those enormous fortifications, constructed partly of reinforced concrete of a thickness of one to six metres, could be turned into a heap of rubbish after only a few hours' bombardment. Having been wounded, I could of course not take part in those operations, but my comrades told me later on how the various forts were taken. Guns of all sizes were turned on them, but it was the 21- and 42-centimetre mortars that really did the work. From afar one could hear the approach of the 42-centimetre shell. The shell bored its way through the air with an uncanny, rushing and hissing sound that was like a long shrill whistling filling the whole atmosphere for seconds. Where it struck everything was destroyed within a radius of several hundred yards. Later I have often gazed in wonderment at those hecatombs which the 42-centimetre mortar erected for itself on all its journeys. The enormous air-pressure caused by the bursting of its shells made it difficult for us Germans in the most advanced positions to breathe for several seconds. To complete the infernal row the Zeppelins appeared at night in order to take part in the work of destruction.

Suddenly the soldiers would hear above their heads the whirring of the propellers and the noise of the motors, well known to most Germans. The Zeppelins came nearer and nearer, but not until they were in the immediate neighbourhood of the forts were they discovered by our opponents, who immediately brought all available search-lights into play in order to search the sky for the dreaded flying enemies. The whirring of the propellers of the airships which had been distributed for work on the various forts suddenly ceased. Then, right up in the air, a blinding light appeared, the search-light of the Zeppelin, which lit up the country beneath it for a short time. Just as suddenly it became dark and quiet, until a few minutes later powerful detonations brought the news that the Zeppelin had dropped its "ballast." That continued for quite a while, explosion followed explosion, interrupted only by small fiery clouds, shrapnel, which the Belgian artillery sent up to the airships, exploding in the air. Then the whirring of the propellers began again, first loud and coming from near, from right above our heads, then softer and softer until the immense ship of the air had entirely disappeared from our view and hearing.

Thus the forts were made level with the ground; thousands of Belgians were lying dead and buried

behind and beneath the ramparts and fortifications. General assault followed. Liége was in the hands of the Germans.

I was with the ambulance column until August 9, and by that time had been restored sufficiently to rejoin my section of the army. After searching for hours I found my company camping in a field. I missed many a good friend; my section had lost sixty-five men, dead and wounded, though it had not taken part in the pursuit of the enemy.

We had been attached to the newly formed 18th Reserve Army Corps (Hessians) and belonged to the Fourth Army, which was under the command of Duke Albrecht of Württemberg. Where that army, which had not yet been formed, was to operate was quite unknown to us private soldiers. We had but to follow to the place where the herd was to be slaughtered; what did it matter where that would be? On August 11 we began to march and covered 25–45 miles every day. We learned later on that we always kept close to the Luxemburg frontier, so as to cross it immediately should necessity arise. Had it not been so oppressively hot we should have been quite content, for we enjoyed several days of rest which braced us up again.

On August 21 we came in contact with the first

German troops belonging to the Fourth Army, about fifteen miles to the east of the Belgian town of Neufchâteau. The battle of Neufchâteau, which lasted from August 22 to 24, had already begun. A French army here met with the Fourth German Army, and a murderous slaughter began. As is always the case it commenced with small skirmishes of advance guards and patrols; little by little ever-growing masses of soldiers took part and when, in the evening of August 22, we were led into the firing-line, the battle had already developed to one of the most murderous of the world-war. When we arrived the French were still in possession of nearly three-quarters of the town. The artillery had set fire to the greater part of Neufchâteau, and only the splendid villas in the western part of the town escaped destruction for the time being. The street fighting lasted the whole night. It was only towards noon of August 23, when the town was in the hands of the Germans, that one could see the enormous losses that both sides had suffered. The dwelling-places, the cellars, the roads and side-walks were thickly covered with dead and horribly wounded soldiers; the houses were ruins, gutted empty shells in which scarcely anything of real value had remained whole. Thousands had been made beggars in a night full of horrors. Women and children, soldiers and citizens were

lying just where death had struck them down, mixed together just as the merciless shrapnel and shells had sent them out of life into the darkness beyond. There had been real impartiality. There lay a German soldier next to a white-haired Frenchwoman; a little Belgian stripling, whom fear had driven out of the house into the street, lay huddled up against the "enemy," a German soldier, who might have been protection and safety for him.

Had we not been shooting and stabbing, murdering and clubbing as much and as vigorously as we could the whole night! And yet there was scarcely one amongst us who did not shed tears of grief and emotion at the spectacles presenting themselves. There was, for instance, a man whose age it was difficult to discover; he was lying dead before a burning house. Both his legs had been burnt up to the knees by the fire falling down upon him. The wife and daughter of the dead man were clinging to him, and were sobbing so piteously that one simply could not bear it. Many, many of the dead had been burnt entirely or partly; the cattle were burning in their stables, and the wild bellowing of those animals fighting against death by fire intermingled with the crying, the moaning, the groaning, and the shrieking of the wounded. But who had the time now to bother about that! Everybody wanted help, everybody wanted to help

himself, everybody was only thinking of himself and his little bit of life. "He who falls remains where he lies; only he who stands can win victories." That one learns from militarism and the average soldier acts upon that principle. And yet most soldiers are forced by circumstances to play the rôle of the Good Samaritan. People who could formerly not look upon blood or a dead person were now bandaging their comrades' arms and legs which had been amputated by shells. They did not do it because they were impelled by the command of their heart, but because they said to themselves that perhaps to-morrow their turn might come and that they, too, might want assistance. It is a healthy egotism which makes men of mercy out of those hardened people.

The French had formed their lines again outside the town in the open. At the moment when the enemy evacuated the town an error was made by the Germans which cost many hundreds of German soldiers their lives. The Germans had occupied the rest of the town with such celerity that our artillery which was pounding that quarter had not been informed of the changed situation, and was raining shell upon shell into our own ranks. That failure of our intelligence department caused the death of many of our comrades. Compelled by the firing of the enemy and our own artillery we

had finally to give up part of our gains, which later on we recovered again with great sacrifice. Curiously enough, the residential quarter with the villas I mentioned before had not suffered seriously; the Red Cross flag was hoisted on the houses in which temporary hospitals were established.

It is here that the Belgian citizens are said to have mutilated some German wounded soldiers. Whether it was true, whether it was only rumoured, as was asserted also many times by German soldiers who had been in the hospitals, I do not know. But this I know, that on August 24, when the French had executed a general retreat, it was made known in an army order that German soldiers had been murdered there and that the German army could not leave the scene of those shameful deeds without having first avenged their poor comrades. The order was therefore given—by the leader of the army—to raze the town without mercy. When later on (it was in the evening and we were pursuing the enemy) we were resting for a short time, clouds of smoke in the east showed that the judgment had been fulfilled. A battery of artillery that had remained behind had razed house after house. Revenge is sweet also for Christian army leaders.

Outside the town the French had reformed their ranks, and were offering the utmost resistance.

But they were no match for the German troops, who consisted largely of young and active men. Frenchmen taken prisoner explained that it was simply impossible to withstand an assault of this war-machine, when the German columns attacked with the bayonet and the cry of "Hurrah! hurrah!" which penetrated to the very marrow. I can understand that, for we sometimes appeared to ourselves to be a good imitation of American Indians, who, like us, rushed upon their enemies with shrill shouts. After a fight lasting three hours many Frenchmen surrendered. Finally, in the night from August 23 to 24, the ranks of the enemy were thrown into confusion and retreated.

I found myself in the first pursuing section. The roads we used were again literally covered with corpses; knapsacks, rifles, dead horses, and men were lying there in a wild jumble. The dead had been partly crushed and pounded to a pulp by the horses and vehicles, an indescribably terrible spectacle even for the most hardened mass-murderer. Dead and wounded were lying to the right and left of the road, in fields, in ditches; the red trousers of the French stood out distinctly against the ground; the field-grey trousers of the Germans were, however, scarcely to be noticed and difficult to discover.

The distance between ourselves and the fleeing

Frenchmen became greater and greater, and the spirit of our soldiers, in spite of the hardships they had undergone, became better and gayer. They joked and sang, forgot the corpses which were still filling the roads and paths, and felt quite at ease. They had already accustomed themselves to the horrible to such a degree that they stepped over the corpses with unconcern, without even making the smallest detour. The experience of those first few weeks of the war had already brutalised us completely. What was to happen to us if this should continue for months . . . ?

III

SHOOTING CIVILIANS IN BELGIUM

At eleven o'clock all further philosophising was put a stop to ; we were ordered to halt, and we were to receive our food from the field-kitchen.

We were quite hungry and ate the tinned soup with the heartiest of appetites. Many of our soldiers were sitting with their dinner-pails on the dead horses that were lying about, and were eating with as much pleasure and heartiness as if they were home at mother's. Nor did some corpses in the neighbourhood of our improvised camp disturb us. There was only a lack of water, and after having eaten thirst began to torment us.

Soon afterwards we continued our march in the scorching midday sun ; dust was covering our uniforms and skin to the depth of almost an inch. We tried in vain to be jolly, but thirst tormented us more and more, and we became weaker and weaker from one quarter of an hour to another. Many in our ranks fell down exhausted, and were simply unable to move. So the commander of our section

had no other choice but to let us halt again if he did not want every one of us to drop out. Thus it happened that we stayed behind a considerable distance, and were not amongst the first that were pursuing the French.

Finally, towards four o'clock, we saw a village in front of us; we began at once to march at a much brisker pace. Among other things we saw a farm-cart on which were several civilian prisoners, apparently snipers. There was also a Catholic priest among them who had, like the others, his hands tied behind his back with a rope. Curiosity prompted us to inquire what he had been up to, and we heard that he had incited the farmers of the village to poison the water.

We soon reached the village and the first well, at which we hoped to quench our thirst thoroughly. But that was no easy matter, for a military guard had been placed before it, who scared us off with the warning, "Poisoned!" Disappointed and terribly embittered, the soldiers, half dead with thirst, gnashed their teeth; they hurried to the next well, but everywhere the same devilish thing occurred—the guard prevented them from drinking. In a square, in the middle of the village, there was a large village well which sent, through two tubes, water as clear as crystal into a large trough. Five soldiers were guarding it and had to watch that

nobody drank of the poisoned water. I was just going to march past it with my pal when suddenly the second, larger portion of our company rushed like madmen to the well. The guards were carried away by the rush, and every one now began to drink the water with the avidity of an animal. All quenched their thirst, and not one of us became ill or died. We heard later on that the priest had to pay for it with his death, as the military authorities "knew" that the water in all the wells of that village was poisoned and that the soldiers had only been saved by a lucky accident! Faithfully the God of the Germans had watched over us; the captured Belgians did not seem to be under His protection. They had to die.

In most places we passed at that time we were warned against drinking the water. The natural consequence was that the soldiers began to hate the population, which they now had to consider to be their bitterest enemies. That again aroused the worst instincts in some soldiers. In every army one finds men with the disposition of barbarians. The many millions of inhabitants in Germany or France are not all civilized people, much as we like to convince ourselves of the contrary. Compulsory military service in those countries forces all without distinction into the army, men and monsters. I have often bitterly resented the wrong one did

to our army in calling us all barbarians, only because among us—as naturally also among the French and English—there were to be found elements that really ought to be in the penitentiary. I will only cite one example of how we soldiers ourselves punished a wretch whom we caught committing a crime.

One evening—it was already dark—we reached a small village to the east of the town of Bertrix, and there, too, found "poisoned" water. We halted in the middle of the village. I was standing before a house with a low window, through which one could see the interior. In the miserable poverty-stricken working-man's dwelling we observed a woman who clung to her children as if afraid they would be torn from her. Though we felt very bitter on account of the want of water, every one of us would have liked to help the poor woman. Some of us were just going to sacrifice our little store of victuals and to say a few comforting words to the woman, when all at once a stone as big as a fist was thrown through the window-pane into the room and hurt a little girl in the right hand. There were sincere cries of indignation, but at the same moment twenty hands at least laid hold of the wretch, a reservist of our company, and gave him such a hiding as to make him almost unconscious. If officers and other men

had not interfered the fellow would have been lynched there and then. He was to be placed before a court-martial later on, but it never came to that. He was drowned in the river at the battle of the Meuse. Many soldiers believed he drowned himself, because he was not only shunned by his fellow-soldiers, but was also openly despised by them.

We were quartered on that village and had to live in a barn. I went with some pals into the village to buy something to eat. At a farmer's house we got ham, bread, and wine, but not for money. The people positively refused to take our money as they regarded us as their guests, so they said; only we were not to harm them. Nevertheless we left them an adequate payment in German money. Later on we found the same situation in many other places. Everywhere people were terribly frightened of us; they began to tremble almost when a German soldier entered their house.

Four of us had formed a close alliance; we had promised each other to stick together and assist each other in every danger. We often also visited the citizens in their houses, and tried to the best of our ability to comfort the sorely tried people and talk them out of their fear of us. Without exception we found them to be lovable, kindly, and good people who soon became confidential and free

of speech when they noticed that we were really their friends. But when, at leaving, we wrote with chalk on the door of their houses, "Bitte schonen, hier wohnen brave, gute Leute!" (Please spare, here live good and decent people) their joy and thankfulness knew no bounds. If so much bad blood was created, if so many incidents happened that led to the shooting by court-martial of innumerable Belgians, the difference of language and the mistakes arising therefrom were surely not the least important causes; of that I and many others of my comrades became convinced during that time in Belgium. But at first the systematically nourished suspicion against the "enemy," too, was partly responsible for it.

In the night we continued our march, after having been attached to the 21-centimetre mortar battery of the 9th Regiment of Foot Artillery which had just arrived; we were not only to serve as covering troops for that battery, but were also to help it place those giants in position when called upon. The gun is transported apart from the carriage on a special wagon. Gun-carriage and gun are drawn each by six horses. Those horses, which are only used by the foot artillery, are the best and strongest of the German army. And yet even these animals are often unable to do the work required of them, so that all available men, seventy

or eighty at times, have to help transport the gun with ropes specially carried for that purpose. That help is chiefly resorted to when the guns leave the road to be placed in firing position. In order to prevent the wheels from sinking into the soil, other wheels, half a yard wide, are attached round them.

These guns are high-angle guns, i.e. their shot rises into the air for several thousand yards, all according to the distance of the spot to be hit, and then drops at a great angle. That is the reason why neither hill nor mountain can protect an enemy battery placed behind those elevations. At first the French had almost no transportable heavy artillery, so that it was quite impossible for them to fight successfully against our guns of large calibre. Under those conditions the German gunners, of course, felt themselves to be top-dog, and decorated their 21-centimetre guns with inscriptions like the following, " Here declarations of war are still being accepted."

We felt quite at ease with the artillery, and were still passably fresh when we halted at six o'clock in the morning, though we had been marching since two o'clock. Near our halting-place we found a broken German howitzer, and next to it two dead soldiers. When firing, a shell had burst in the gun, destroying it entirely. Two men of the crew had

been killed instantly and some had been seriously wounded by the flying pieces. We utilised the pause to bury the two dead men, put both of them in one grave, placed both their helmets on the grave, and wrote on a board: "Here rest two German Artillerymen."

We had to proceed, and soon reached the town of Bertrix. Some few houses to the left and right of the road were burning fiercely; we soon got to know that they had been set alight because soldiers marching past were said to have been shot at from those houses. Before one of these houses a man and his wife and their son, a boy of fifteen or sixteen, lay half burnt to cinders; all had been covered with straw. Three more civilians lay dead in the same street.

We had marched past some more houses when all at once shots rang out; they had been shooting from some house, and four of our soldiers had been wounded. For a short while there was confusion. The house from which the shots must have come was soon surrounded, and hand-grenades were thrown through all the windows into the interior. In an instant all the rooms were in flames. The exploding hand-grenades caused such an enormous air-pressure that all the doors were blown from their hinges and the inner walls torn to shreds. Almost at the same time, five men in civilian clothes

rushed into the street and asked for quarter with uplifted hands. They were seized immediately and taken to the officers, who formed themselves into a tribunal within a few minutes. Ten minutes later sentence had already been executed: five strong men lay on the ground, blindfolded, their bodies riddled by bullets.

Six of us had in each of the five cases to execute the sentence, and unfortunately I, too, belonged to those thirty men. The condemned man whom my party of six had to shoot was a tall, lean man, about forty years of age. He did not wince for a moment when they blindfolded him. In a garden of a house near-by he was placed with his back against the house, and after our captain had told us that it was our duty to aim well so as to end the tragedy quickly, we took up our position six paces from the condemned one. The sergeant commanding us had told us before to shoot the condemned man through the chest. We then formed two lines, one behind the other. The command was given to load and secure, and we pushed five cartridges into the rifle. Then the command rang out, "Get ready!" The first line knelt, the second stood up. We held our rifles in such a position that the barrel pointed in front of us whilst the butt-end rested somewhere near the hip. At the command, "Aim!" we slowly brought

our rifles into shooting position, grasped them firmly, pressed the plate of the butt-end against the shoulder and, with our cheek on the butt-end, we clung convulsively to the neck of the rifle. Our right forefinger was on the trigger, the sergeant gave us about half a minute for aiming before commanding, "Fire!"

Even to-day I cannot say whether our victim fell dead on the spot or how many of the six bullets hit him. I ran about all day long like a drunken man, and reproached myself most bitterly with having played the executioner. For a long time I avoided speaking about it with fellow-soldiers, for I felt guilty. And yet—what else could we soldiers do but obey the order?

During the preceding night there had been encounters at Bertrix between the German military and the population. Houses were burning in every part of the town. In the market-place there was a great heap of guns and revolvers of all makes. At the clergyman's house they had found a French machine-gun and ammunition, whereupon the clergyman and his female cook had been arrested and, I suppose, placed immediately before a court-martial.

Under those conditions we were very glad to get out of Bertrix again. We marched on in the afternoon. After a march of some three miles we

halted, and received food from the field-kitchen. But this time we felt no appetite. The recollection of the incidents of the morning made all of us feel so depressed that the meal turned out a real funeral repast. Silently we set in motion again, and camped in the open in the evening, as we were too tired to erect tents.

It was there that all discipline went to pieces for the first time. The officers' orders to put up tents were not heeded in the slightest degree. The men were dog-tired, and suffered the officers to command and chatter as much as they liked. Every one wrapped himself up in his cloak, lay down where he was, and as soon as one had lain down one was asleep. The officers ran about like mad shouting with redoubled energy their commands at the exhausted soldiers; in vain. The officers, of course, had gone through the whole performance on horseback and, apparently, did not feel sufficiently tired to go to sleep. When their calling and shouting had no effect they had recourse to personal physical exertion and began to shake us up. But as soon as one of us was awake the one before had gone to sleep again. Thus for a while we heard the exhortation, "I say, you! Get up! Fall in line for putting up tents!" Whereupon one turned contentedly on the other side and snoozed on. They tried to shake me awake too but after

having sent some vigorous curses after the lieutenant—there was no lack of cursing on either side that evening—I continued to sleep the sleep of the just.

For the first time blind discipline had failed. The human body was so exhausted that it was simply unable to play any longer the rôle of the obedient dog.

IV

GERMAN SOLDIERS AND BELGIAN CIVILIANS

THE march had made us very warm, and the night was cold. We shivered all over, and one after the other had to rise in order to warm himself by moving about. There was no straw to be had, and our thin cloaks offered but little protection. The officers slept in sleeping-bags and woollen blankets.

Gradually all had got up, for the dew had soaked our clothing; things were very uncomfortable. The men stood about in groups and criticised the incidents of the preceding day. The great majority were of the opinion that we should tell the officers distinctly that in future it would not be so easy for them to work their deeds of oppression. One of the older reservists proposed that we should simply refuse in future to execute a command to shoot a condemned man; he thought that if all of us clung together, nothing could happen to us. However, we begged him to be careful, for if such

expressions were reported they would shoot him for sedition without much ado. Nevertheless, all of us were probably agreed that the reservist had spoken exactly what was in our minds. The bitter feeling was general, but we would not and could not commit any imprudent action. We had learned enough in those few days of the war to know that war brutalises, and that brutal force can no longer distinguish right from wrong; and with that force we had to reckon.

Meanwhile the time had come to march on. Before that we had to drink our coffee and arrange our baggage. When we were ready to march the captain gave us a speech in which he referred to the insubordination of the night before. "I take it," he said, "that it was the result of your stupidity. For if I were not convinced of that I would send you all before a court-martial, and all of you would be made unhappy for the rest of your lives. But in future," he continued after a short reflection, "I will draw the reins so tightly that incidents like these can never happen again, and the devil must be in it if I cannot master you. An order is an order, even if one imagines himself too tired."

We joined the mortar battery again, and continued our march. The country we were passing rough was dreary and monotonous so that that

part of our march offered few interesting changes. The few tiny villages we came through were all abandoned by their inhabitants, and the poverty-stricken dwellings were mostly devastated. However, we met long lines of refugees. These people had as a rule fled with the French army, and were returning now, only to find their homes destroyed by the brutal hand of war. After a lengthy march broken by rests and bivouacs, we neared the fairly large village of Sugny, on the Belgo-French frontier just inside Belgian territory.

It was about noon, and though the steadily increasing thunder of guns pointed to the development of another battle, we hoped to be able to stay at the place during the night. We entered it towards one o'clock, and were again quartered in a large barn. Most of the soldiers refused the food from the field-kitchen, and " requisitioned " eggs, chicken, geese, and even small pigs, and soon general cooking was in full swing. Everywhere the pots were steaming. Unfortunately most had taken the animals and food-stuffs from the inhabitants without paying for them.

Several soldiers arrived with barrels and bottles of wine, which were at once beheaded and emptied in spite of the warnings and admonitions of the wiser amongst us. It naturally followed that

several sergeants and men were soon almost helplessly drunk. The proprietor of "our" barn had three medium-sized pigs left. One of those intoxicated sergeants attempted to kill one of the pigs with a blunt pocket-knife. He had tormented the poor beast almost to death when some sober soldiers caught him in the act. The animal was killed by a shot through the head, and the sergeant had to go to sleep at once. But that was only one incident of many, and not at all the worst one. The inhabitants of Sugny had to suffer much from the drunkenness of our men. The open and secret plundering of gardens, stables, and houses was quite a common thing, and as the soldiers were practically left to do what they pleased, no matter what happened or how many complaints were made, matters could naturally not improve.

That part of the country had twice harboured the French, and now we Germans were there. That the population suffered from want and hunger was not to be wondered at, and often we divided our rations with the severely tried people. Myself and two mates had given our "iron ration" (preserved meat and vegetables and a bag of biscuits) to a woman "blessed" with eight children. At the call we could not show our "iron one," so we each of us had to mount guard twice as a punishment for that feeble proof of our charity.

Our half-file leader, Lieutenant Spahn, expressed the opinion that pity was idiocy, and if the woman had eight children it was her own concern. Then he concluded literally with great emphasis: "In war everybody is his own nearest neighbour, even if all around us die in a ditch."

Another soldier got fourteen days' close confinement. He was on his way with bread for a hungry poor family, and had in his arms six of those little army loaves which he had begged from the soldiers. He was met by that same Lieutenant Spahn, who was in company of some sergeants. When Spahn asked him where he was taking the bread the sapper replied that he was on his way to a poor family that was really starving. The lieutenant then ordered him to take the bread immediately to the company. Thereupon he overwhelmed the soldier with all the "military" expressions he could think of, like "Are you mad?" "Donkey!" "Silly ass!" "Duffer!" "Idiot!" etc. When the soldier nevertheless showed no sign of confusion, but started to proceed on his way, the lieutenant roared out the order again, whereupon the soldier turned round, threw the bread before the feet of Lieutenant Spahn, and said quietly: "The duffers and idiots have to shed their blood to preserve also your junker family from the misery that has been brought upon this poor population."

That the sapper got only two weeks of close confinement for "unmannerly conduct towards a superior" with aggravating circumstances was a wonder; he had indeed got off cheaply.

According to martial law he had to work off his punishment in the following manner: When his company went to rest in the evening, or after a fight or a march, he had to report himself every day for two weeks at the local or camp guard. While the company was resting and the men could move about freely, he had to be in the guard-room, which he could only leave to do his needs, and then only by permission of the sergeant on guard, and in company of a soldier belonging to the guard. He was not allowed to smoke or read or converse or speak, received his rations from the guard, and had to stay in the guard-room until his company marched off. Besides that he was tied to a tree or some other object for fully two hours every day. He was fettered with ropes and had to spend those two hours standing, even if he had marched thirty miles or had risked his life in a fight for the same "Fatherland" that bound him in fetters.

The resentment continued to grow and, in consequence of the many severe punishments that were inflicted, had reached such a height that most soldiers refused to fetter their comrades. I, too, refused, and when I continued my refusals in spite

of repeated orders I was likewise condemned to two weeks of close confinement as an "entirely impenitent sinner," for "not obeying an order given," and for "persistent disobedience."

V

THE HORRORS OF STREET FIGHTING

We left Sugny the next morning, and an hour later we crossed the Belgo-French frontier. Here, too, we had to give three cheers. The frontier there runs through a wood, and on the other side of the wood we placed the 21-centimetre mortars in position.

Our troops were engaged with the rear-guard of the enemy near the French village of Vivier-au-Court. We were brought in to reinforce them, and after a five hours' fight the last opponents had retired as far as the Meuse. Vivier-au-Court had hardly suffered at all when we occupied it towards noon. Our company halted again here to wait for the mortar battery.

Meanwhile we walked through the village to find some eatables. After visiting several houses we came upon the family of a teacher. Father and son were both soldiers; two daughters of about twenty and twenty-two were alone with their mother. The mother was extremely shy, and all the three women were crying when we entered the

home. The eldest daughter received us with great friendliness and, to our surprise, in faultless German. We endeavoured to pacify the women, begging them not to cry; we assured them again and again that we would not harm them, and told them all kinds of merry stories to turn their thoughts to other things.

One of my mates related that in a fight in the morning we had lost seven men and that several on our side had been wounded. That only increased the women's excitement, a thing we really could not understand. At last one of the girls, who had been the first one to compose herself, explained to us why they were so much excited. The girl had been at a boarding school at Charlottenburg (Germany) for more than two years, and her brother, who worked in Berlin as a civil engineer, had taken a holiday for three months after her graduation in order to accompany his sister home. Both had liked living in Germany; it was only the sudden outbreak of war that had prevented the young engineer from returning to Berlin. He had to enter the French army, and belonged to the same company in which his father was an officer of the reserve.

After a short interval the girl continued: "My father and brother were here only this morning. They have fought against you. It may have been

one of their bullets which struck your comrades down. Oh, how terrible it is! Now they are away —they who had only feelings of respect and friendship for the Germans—and as long as the Germans are between them and us we shall not be able to know whether they are dead or alive. Who is it that has this terrible war, this barbaric crime, on his conscience?" Tears were choking her speech, and our own eyes did not remain dry. All desire to eat had gone; after a silent pressing of hands we slunk away.

We remained in the village till the evening, meanwhile moving about freely. In the afternoon nine men of my company were arrested; it was alleged against them that they had laid hands on a woman. They were disarmed and kept at the local guard-house; the same thing happened to some men of the infantry. Seven men of my company returned in the evening; what became of the other two I have not been able to find out.

At that time a great tobacco famine reigned amongst us soldiers. I know that one mark and more was paid for a single cigarette, if any could be got at all. At Vivier-au-Court there was only one tobacco store run by a man employed by the State. I have seen that man being forced by sergeants at the point of the pistol to deliver his whole store of tobacco for a worthless order of

requisition. The "gentlemen" later on sold that tobacco for half a mark a packet.

Towards the evening we marched off, and got the mortar battery in a new position from where the enemy's positions on the Meuse were bombarded.

After a short march we engaged the French to the north-east of Donchery. On this side of the Meuse the enemy had only his rear-guard, whose task was to cover the crossing of the main French armies, a movement which was almost exclusively effected at Sedan and Donchery. We stuck close to the heels of our opponents, who did not retreat completely till darkness began to fall. The few bridges left did not allow him to withdraw his forces altogether as quickly as his interest demanded. Thus it came about that an uncommonly murderous nocturnal street fight took place in Donchery, which was burning at every corner. The French fought with immense energy; an awful slaughter was the result. Man against man! That "man against man!" is the most terrible thing I have experienced in war. Nobody can tell afterwards how many he has killed. You have gripped your opponent, who is sometimes weaker, sometimes stronger than yourself. In the light of the burning houses you observe that the white of his eyes has turned red; his mouth is covered with

a thick froth. With head uncovered, with dishevelled hair, the uniform unbuttoned and mostly ragged, you stab, hew, scratch, bite, and strike about you like a wild animal. It means life or death. You fight for your life. No quarter is given. You only hear the gasping, groaning, jerky breathing. You only think of your own life, of death, of home. In feverish haste, as in a whirlwind, old memories are rushing through your mind. Yet you get more excited from minute to minute, for exhaustion tries to master you ; but that must not be—not now ! And again the fight is renewed ; again there is hewing, stabbing, biting. Without rifle, without any weapon in a life-and-death struggle. You or I ? I ? I ?—Never ! You ! The exertion becomes superhuman. Now a thrust, a vicious bite, and you are the victor. Victor for the moment, for already the next man, who has just finished off one of your mates, is upon you. . . . You suddenly remember that you have a dagger about you. After a hasty fumbling you find it in the prescribed place. A swift movement and the dagger buries itself deeply in the body of the other man.

Onward ! onward ! new enemies are coming up, real enemies. How clearly the thought suddenly flashes on you that that man is your enemy, that he is seeking to take your life, that he bites, strikes,

and scratches, tries to force you down and plant his dagger in your heart. Again you use your dagger. Thank heaven! He is down. Saved! Still, you must have that dagger back! You pull it out of his chest. A jet of warm blood rushes out of the gaping wound and strikes your face. Human blood, warm human blood! You shake yourself, horror strikes you for only a few seconds. The next one approaches; again you have to defend your skin. Again and again the mad murdering is repeated, all night long. . . .

Finally, towards four o'clock in the morning, the rest of the French surrendered after some companies of infantry had occupied two roads leading to the bridges. When the French on the other side became aware of this they blew up the bridges without considering their own troops who were still on them. Germans and Frenchmen were tossed in the air, men and human limbs were sent to the sky, friend and foe found a watery grave in the Meuse.

One could now survey with some calm the scene of the mighty slaughter. Dead lay upon dead, it was misery to behold them, and above and around them all there were flames and a thick, choking smoke. But one was already too brutalised to feel pity at the spectacle; the feeling of humanity had been blown to all the winds. The groaning

and crying, the pleading of the wounded did not touch one. Some Catholic nuns were lying dead before their convent. You saw it and passed on.

The only building that had escaped destruction was the barracks of the 25th Regiment of French Dragoons. However, we had not much time to inspect things, for at seven o'clock the French artillery already began sending shell after shell into the village. We entrenched behind a thick garden wall, immediately behind the Meuse. Our side of the Meuse was flat, the opposite one went up steeply. There the French infantry had entrenched themselves, having built three positions on the slope, one tier above the other. As the enemy's artillery overshot the mark we remained outside their fire. We had, however, an opportunity to observe the effects of the shots sent by our own artillery into the enemy's infantry position on the slope in front of us. The shells (21-centimetre) whizzed above our heads and burst with a tremendous noise, each time causing horrible devastation in the enemy's trenches.

The French were unable to resist long such a hail of shells. They retreated and abandoned all the heights of the Meuse. They had evacuated the town of Sedan without a struggle. In fact, that town remained completely intact, in contrast to the completely demolished Donchery. Not a house

in Sedan had suffered. When the rallying-call was sounded at Donchery it turned out that my company had lost thirty men in that fight. We mustered behind the barracks of the dragoons, and our company, which had shrunk to ninety men, was ordered to try and build a pontoon bridge across the Meuse at a place as yet unknown to us. Having been reinforced by eighty men of the second company we marched away in small groups so as not to draw the enemy's attention to us. After an hour's march we halted in a small wood, about 200 yards away from the Meuse, and were allowed to rest until darkness began to fall.

When it had become dark the bridge transportation column—it was that belonging to our division —came up across the fields, to be followed soon after by that of the army corps. All preparations having been made and the chief preliminaries, like the placing of the trestle and the landing-boards, gone through, the various pontoon-wagons drove up noiselessly, in order to be unloaded just as noiselessly and with lightning speed. We had already finished four pontoons, i.e. twenty yards of bridge, without being observed by our opponent. Everything went on all right. Suddenly the transportable search-lights of the enemy went into action, and swept up and down the river. Though we had thrown ourselves flat upon the ground

wherever we stood, our opponents had observed us, for the searchlights kept moving a little to and fro and finally kept our spot under continual illumination. We were discovered. We scarcely had time to consider, for an artillery volley almost immediately struck the water to our left and right. We were still lying flat on the ground when four more shots came along, that time a little nearer to the bridge, and one shot struck the bank of the river.

Immediately another volley followed, and two shells struck the bridge. Some sappers fell into the water and two fell dead on the bridge; those in the water swam ashore and escaped with a cold ducking. One only was drowned. It was the man of whom I told before that he was despised by his fellow-soldiers because he had hurt the child of a poor woman with a stone he had thrown through the window into her room.

VI

CROSSING THE MEUSE

In spite of the continual and severe cannonading of the artillery we succeeded in fetching away the two dead soldiers and bringing them on land. The bridge had been much damaged so that we could do nothing but replace the ruined pontoons by new ones. When the firing of the artillery had died down somewhat we began the difficult task for the second time. But we had scarcely begun when another salvo found its mark and damaged the bridge severely; fortunately no losses were inflicted upon us that time. We were now ordered to retire, only to begin afresh after half an hour.

The enemy's search-lights had been extinguished, and we were able to take some ten pontoons into line without being molested. Then, suddenly, we were again overwhelmed by the fire of the artillery; the enemy's patrols had noticed us. Several batteries had opened fire on us at the same time, and in ten minutes' time all our work was nothing

but a heap of sinking pontoons; twelve men were killed.

We were now ordered to march away. Only eight of our party were left behind to look after the dead and wounded. We set out to get out of the danger zone. After having marched up-stream for a distance of about a mile and a quarter we halted and observed that the bridge-building section of the army corps was present again. We were told that we should complete the individual links of the bridge on land. Those bridge-links, consisting each of two pontoons, were firmly tied together, provided with anchors and all accessories, completed on land, and then let down into the water. The site of the bridge, which had meanwhile been determined upon, was made known to us, and we rowed with all our might down the river towards that spot.

Our opponent, who had gained no knowledge of that ruse, did not molest us, and in quick succession all the bridge-links reached the determined place. The various links were rowed into their proper position with tremendous speed and joined together. It did not take quite twenty minutes to get everything just sufficiently in shape. The infantry, who had kept in readiness, then rushed across the bridge, which had been thickly strewn with straw so as to deaden the noise.

At the same time we had begun to cross the

river by pontoon at various points, and before the French were properly aware of what was going on, the other side of the river had been occupied by our troops and was soon firmly held by them.

The French artillery and infantry now began to pour a terrific fire on the pontoons. We, the sappers, who were occupying the pontoons of the bridge, were now for the greater part relieved and replaced by infantry, but were distributed among the rowing pontoons to serve as crews. I was placed at the helm of one of the pontoons. With four sappers at the oars and eighteen infantrymen as our passengers we began our first trip in an infernal rain of missiles. We were lucky enough to reach the other side of the river with only one slightly wounded sapper. I relieved that man, who then took the steering part. On the return trip our pontoon was hit by some rifle-bullets, but happily only above the water-line. To our right and left the pontoons were crossing the river, some of them in a sinking condition.

The sappers, who are all able to swim, sought to reach the bank of the river and simply jumped into the water, whilst the infantrymen were drowned in crowds. Having landed and manned another pontoon we pushed off once more, and pulling the oars through the water with superhuman strength we made the trip a second time. That time we

reached the other side with two dead men and a wounded infantryman. We had not yet reached the other side when all the infantry jumped into the shallow water and waded ashore. We turned our boat to row back with the two dead men on board. Our hands began to hurt much from the continual rowing, and were soon covered with blisters and blood-blisters. Still, we had to row, however much our hands might swell and hurt; there was no resting on your oars then.

We were about twenty yards from shore when our pontoon was hit below the water-line by several rifle-bullets at the same time. A shot entering a pontoon leaves a hole no bigger than the shot itself, but its exit on the other side of the pontoon may be as big as a fist or a plate. Our pontoon then began to sink rapidly, so that we sappers had no choice but to jump into the icy water. Scarcely had we left the boat when it disappeared; but all of us reached the river-bank safely. We were saved—for the moment. In spite of our wet clothes we had to man another boat immediately, and without properly regaining breath we placed our torn hands again on the oars.

We had scarcely reached the middle of the river when we collided with another boat. That other boat, which had lost her helmsman and two oarsmen, rammed us with such force that our pontoon

turned turtle immediately and took down with her all the eighteen infantrymen besides one of the sappers. Four of us saved ourselves in another pontoon and, thoroughly wet, we steered her to the left bank. We had just landed when we were commanded to bring over a pontoon laden with ammunition, and the "joy-ride" was renewed. We crossed the Meuse about five times after that.

Meanwhile day had come. On the left bank a terrible fight had begun between the German troops that had been landed and the French. The Germans enjoyed the advantage that they were no longer exposed to the French artillery.

We got a short rest, and lay wet to the skin in an old trench shivering all over with cold. Our hands were swollen to more than double their ordinary size; they hurt us so much that we could not even lift our water-bottles to our mouths. It must have been a harrowing sight to watch us young, strong fellows lying on the ground helpless and broken.

VII

IN PURSUIT

After a short rest we were commanded to search the burning houses for wounded men. We did not find many of them, for most of the severely wounded soldiers who had not been able to seek safety unaided had been miserably burnt to death, and one could only judge by the buttons and weapons of the poor wretches for what "Fatherland" they had suffered their terrible death by fire. With many it was even impossible to find out the nationality they belonged to; a little heap of ashes, a ruined house, were all that was left of whole families, whole streets of families.

It was only the wine-cellars, which were mostly of strong construction, that had generally withstood the flames. The piping hot wine in bottles and barrels proved a welcome refreshment for the soldiers, who were wet to their skins and stiff with cold. Even at the risk of their lives (for many of the cellars threatened to collapse) the soldiers would fetch out the wine

and drink it greedily, however hot the wine might be.

And, strangely enough, former scenes were repeated. After the hot wine had taken effect, after again feeling refreshed and physically well, that same brutality which had become our second nature in war showed itself again in the most shameful manner. Most of us behaved as if we had not taken part in the unheard-of events of the last hours, as if we did not see the horrible reminders of the awful slaughter, as if we had entirely forgotten the danger of extinction which we had so narrowly escaped. No effort was made to do honour to the dead, though every one had been taught that duty by his mother from the earliest infancy ; there was nothing left of that natural shyness which the average man feels in the presence of death. The pen refuses even to attempt a reproduction of the expressions used by officers and soldiers, or a description of their actions, when they set about to establish the nationality or sex of the dead. Circumstances were stronger than we men, and I convinced myself again that it was only natural that all feelings of humanity should disappear after the daily routine of murdering, and that only the instinct of self-preservation should survive in all its strength. The longer the war lasted the more murderous and bestial the men became.

Meanwhile the fight between our troops that had crossed the river and the French on the other side of the Meuse had reached its greatest fury. Our troops had suffered great losses; now our turn came. While we were crossing, the German artillery pounded the enemy's positions with unheard-of violence. Scarcely had we landed and taken our places when our section proceeded to the assault. The artillery became silent, and running forward we tried to storm the slope leading to the enemy's positions. We got as near as 200 yards when the French machine-guns came into action; we were driven back with considerable losses. Ten minutes later we attempted again to storm the positions, but had only to go back again exactly as before. Again we took up positions in our trenches, but all desire for fighting had left us; every one stared stupidly in front of him. Of course we were not allowed to lose courage, though the victims of our useless assaults were covering the field, and our dead mates were constantly before our eyes.

The artillery opened fire again; reinforcements arrived. Half an hour later we stormed for the third time over the bodies of our dead comrades. That time we went forward in rushes, and when we halted before the enemy's trench for the last time, some twenty yards away from it, our opponent withdrew his whole first line. The riddle of that

sudden retreat we were able to solve some time later. It turned out that the main portions of the French army had retreated long ago; we had merely been engaged in rear-guard actions, which, however, had proved very costly to us.

During the next hour the enemy evacuated all the heights of the Meuse. When we reached the ridge of those heights we were able to witness a horrifying sight with our naked eyes. The roads which the retreating enemy was using could be easily surveyed. In close marching formation the French were drawing off. The heaviest of our artillery (21-centimetre) was pounding the retreating columns, and shell after shell fell among the French infantry and other troops. Hundreds of French soldiers were literally torn to pieces. One could see bodies and limbs being tossed in the air and being caught in the trees bordering the roads.

We sappers were ordered to rally, and we were soon going after the fleeing enemy. It was our task to again make passable for our troops the roads which had been pounded and dug up by the shells; that was all the more difficult in the mid-day sun, as we had first to remove the dead and wounded. Two men would take a dead soldier by his head and feet and fling him in a ditch. Human corpses were here treated and used exactly as a board in bridge-building. Several arms and

legs were flung through the air into the ditch in the same manner. How often since have I not thought of these and similar incidents, asking myself whether I thought those things improper or immoral at the time! Again and again I had to return a negative answer, and I am therefore fully convinced of how little the soldiers can be held responsible for the brutalities which all of them commit, to whatever nation they belong. They are no longer civilised human beings, they are simply bloodthirsty brutes, for otherwise they would be bad, very bad soldiers.

When, during the first months of the war, a Social-Democratic Member of Parliament announced that he had resolved to take voluntary service in the army because he believed that in that manner he could further the cause of humanity on the battle-field, many a one began to laugh, and it was exactly our Socialist comrades in our company who made pointed remarks. For all of us were agreed that that representative of the people must either be very simple-minded or insincere.

The dead horses and shattered batteries had also to be removed. We were not strong enough to get the bodies of the horses out of the way so we caught a horse roaming about without a master, and fastened it to a dead one to whose

leg we had attached a noose, and thus we cleared the carcass out of the road. The portions of human bodies hanging in the trees we left, however, undisturbed. For who was there to care about such " trifles " !

We searched the bottles and knapsacks of the dead for eatable and drinkable things, and enjoyed the things found with the heartiest appetite imaginable. Hunger and thirst are pitiless customers that cannot be turned away by fits of sentimentality.

Proceeding on our march we found the line of retreat of the enemy thickly strewn with discarded rifles, knapsacks, and other accoutrements. French soldiers who had died of sunstroke were covering the roads in masses. Others had crawled into the fields to the left and right, where they were expecting help or death. But we could not assist them, for we judged ourselves happy if we could keep our worn-out bodies from collapsing altogether. But even if we had wanted to help them we should not have been allowed to do so, for the order was " Forward ! "

At that time I began to notice in many soldiers what I had never observed before—they felt envious. Many of my mates envied the dead soldiers and wished to be in their place in order to be at least through with all their misery. Yet

all of us were afraid of dying—afraid of dying, be it noted, not of death. All of us often longed for death, but we were horrified at the slow dying, lasting hours, which is the rule on the battle-field, that process which makes the wounded abandoned soldier die piecemeal. I have witnessed the death of hundreds of young men in their prime, but I know of none among them who died willingly. A young sapper of the name of Kellner, whose home was at Cologne, had his whole abdomen ripped open by a shell splinter so that his entrails were hanging to the ground. Maddened by pain he begged me to assure him that he would not have to die. Of course I assured him that his wounds were by no means severe and that the doctor would be there immediately to help him. Though I was a layman who had never had the slightest acquaintance with the treatment of patients, I was perfectly aware that the poor fellow could only live through a few hours of pain. But my words comforted him. He died ten minutes later.

We had to march on and on. The captain told us we had been ordered to press the fleeing enemy as hard as possible. He was answered by a disapproving murmur from the whole section. For long days and nights we had been on our legs, had murdered like savages, had had neither opportunity nor possibility to eat or rest, and now they

asked us worn-out men to conduct an obstinate pursuit. The captain knew very well what we were feeling and tried to pacify us with kind words.

The cavalry divisions had not been able to cross the Meuse for want of apparatus and bridges. For the present the pursuit had to be carried out by infantry and comparatively small bodies of artillery. Thus we had to press on in any case, at least until the cavalry and machine-gun sections had crossed the bridges that had remained intact farther down stream near Sedan. Round Somme-Py the French rear-guard faced us again. When four batteries of our artillery went into action at that place our company and two companies of infantry with machine-guns were told off to cover the artillery.

The artillery officers thought that the covering troops were insufficient, because aeroplanes had established the presence of large masses of hostile cavalry, an attack from whom was feared. But reinforcements could not be had as there was a lack of troops for the moment. So we had to take up positions as well as we could. We dug shallow trenches to the left and right of the battery in a nursery of fir-trees, which were about a yard high. The machine-guns were built in and got ready, and ammunition was made ready for use in large

quantities. We had not yet finished our preparations when the shells of our artillery began to whizz above our heads and pound the ranks of our opponent. The fir nursery concealed us from the enemy, but a little wood, some 500 yards in front of us, effectively shut out our view.

We were now instructed in what we were to do in case of an attack by cavalry. An old white-haired major of the infantry had taken command. We sappers were distributed among the infantry, but those brave "gentlemen," our officers, had suddenly disappeared. Probably the defence of the Fatherland is in their opinion only the duty of the common soldier. As those "gentlemen" are only there to command, and as we had been placed under the orders of infantry officers for that undertaking, they had become superfluous and had taken French leave.

Our instructions were to keep quiet in case of an attack by cavalry, to take aim, and not allow ourselves to be seen. We were not to fire until a machine-gun, commanded by the major in person, went into action, and then we were to fire as rapidly as the rifle could be worked; we were not to forget to aim quietly, but quickly.

Our batteries fired with great violence, their aiming being regulated by a biplane, soaring high up in the air, by means of signals which were

given by rockets, whose significance experts only could understand.

One quarter of an hour followed the other, and we were almost convinced that we should be lucky enough that time to be spared going into action. Suddenly things became lively. One man nudged the other, and all eyes were turned to the edge of the little wood some five hundred yards in front of us. A vast mass of horsemen emerged from both sides of the little wood, and, uniting in front of it, rushed towards us. That immense lump of living beings approached our line in a mad gallop. Glancing back involuntarily I observed that our artillery had completely ceased firing and that its crews were getting their carbines ready to defend their guns.

But quicker than I can relate it misfortune came thundering up. Without being quite aware of what I was doing I felt all over my body to find some place struck by a horse's hoof. The cavalry came nearer and nearer in their wild career. Already one could see the hoofs of the horses, which scarcely touched the earth and seemed to fly over the few hundred yards of ground. We recognised the riders in their soiled uniforms; we even thought we could notice the excited faces of the horsemen, who were expecting a sudden hail of bullets to mow them down. Meanwhile they had

approached to a distance of some 350 yards. The snorting of the horses was every moment becoming more distinct. No machine-gun firing was yet to be heard. Three hundred yards—250. My neighbour poked me in the ribs rather indelicately, saying, "Has the old mass-murderer [I did not doubt for a moment that he meant the major] gone mad! It's all up with us, to be sure!" I paid no attention to his talk. Every nerve in my body was hammering away; convulsively I clung to my rifle, and awaited the calamity. Two hundred yards! Nothing as yet. Was the old chap blind or . . . ? One hundred and eighty yards! I felt a cold sweat running down my back and trembled as if my last hour had struck. One hundred and fifty! My neighbour pressed close to me. The situation became unbearable. One hundred and thirty—an infernal noise had started. Rrrrrrrr— An overwhelming hail of bullets met the attacking party and scarcely a bullet missed the lump of humanity and beasts.

The first ranks were struck down. Men and beasts formed a wall on which rolled the waves of succeeding horses, only to be smashed by that terrible hail of bullets. "Continue firing!" rang out the command, which was not needed. "More lively!" The murderous work was carried out more rapidly and with more crushing effect.

Hundreds of volleys were sent straight into the heap of living beings struggling against death. Hundreds were laid low every second. Scarcely a hundred yards in front of us lay more than six hundred men and horses, on top of each other, beside each other, apart, in every imaginable position. What five minutes ago had been a picture of strength, proud horsemen, joyful youth, was now a bloody, shapeless, miserable lump of bleeding flesh.

And what about ourselves? We laughed about our heroic deed and cracked jokes. When danger was over we lost that anxious feeling which had taken possession of us. Was it fear? It is, of course, supposed that a German soldier knows no fear—at the most he fears God, but nothing else in the world—and yet it was fear, low vulgar fear that we feel just as much as the French, the English, or the Turks, and he who dares to contradict this and talk of bravery and the fearless courage of the warrior has either never been in war or is a vulgar liar and hypocrite.

Why were we joyful and why did we crack jokes? Because it was the others and not ourselves who had to lose their lives that time. Because it was a life-and-death struggle. It was either we or they. We had a right to be glad and chase all sentimentality to the devil. Were we not soldiers, mass-murderers, barbarians?

VIII

NEARLY BURIED ALIVE ON THE BATTLE-FIELD

The commander of the artillery smilingly came up to the major of the infantry and thanked and congratulated him.

We then went after the rest of our attackers, who were in full flight. The machine-guns kept them under fire. Some two hundred might have escaped; they fled in all directions. The artillery thereupon again began to fire, whilst we set about to care for our wounded enemies. It was no easy job, for we had to draw the wounded from beneath the horses, some of which were still alive. The animals kicked wildly about them, and whenever they succeeded in getting free they rushed off as if demented, however severely they had been hurt. Many a wounded man who otherwise might have recovered was thus killed by the hoofs of the horses.

With the little packet of bandaging material which we all had on us we bandaged the men,

who were mostly severely wounded, but a good many died in our hands while we were trying to put on a temporary dressing. As far as they were still able to speak they talked to us with extreme vivacity. Though we did not understand their language we knew what they wanted to express, for their gestures and facial expressions were very eloquent. They desired to express their gratitude for the charitable service we were rendering them, and like ourselves they did not seem to be able to understand how men could first kill each other, could inflict pain on each other, and then assist each other to the utmost of their ability. To them as well as to us this world seemed to stand on its head; it was a world in which they were mere marionettes, guided and controlled by a superior power. How often were we not made aware in that manner of the uselessness of all this human slaughter!

We common soldiers were here handling the dead and wounded as if we had never done anything else, and yet in our civilian lives most of us had an abhorrence and fear of the dead and the horribly mangled. War is a hard schoolmaster, who bends and reshapes his pupils.

One section was busy with digging a common grave for the dead. We took away the papers and valuables of the dead, took possession of the eatable

and drinkable stores to be found in the saddle-bags attached to the horses, and when the grave was ready we began to place the dead bodies in it. They were laid close together in order to utilise fully the available space. I, too, had been ordered to " bring in " the dead. The bottom of the grave was large enough for twenty-three bodies if the space was well utilised. When two layers of twenty-three had already been buried, a sergeant of the artillery, who was standing near, observed that one of the " dead " was still alive. He had seen the " corpse " move the fingers of his right hand. On closer examination it turned out that we came near burying a living man, for after an attempt lasting two hours we succeeded in restoring him to consciousness. The officer of the infantry who supervised the work now turned to the two soldiers charged with getting the corpses ready and asked them whether they were sure that all the men buried were really dead. " Yes," the two replied, " we suppose they are all dead." That seemed to be quite sufficient for that humane officer, for he ordered the interments to proceed. Nobody doubted that there were several more among the 138 men whom we alone buried in one grave (two other, still bigger, graves had been dug by different burial-parties) from whose bodies life had not entirely flown. To be buried alive is just one of

those horrors of the battle-field which your bar-room patriot does not even dream of in his philosophy.

Nothing was to be seen of the enemy's infantry. It seemed that our opponent had sent only artillery and cavalry to face us. Meanwhile the main portions of our army came up in vast columns. Cavalry divisions with mounted artillery and machine-gun sections left all the other troops behind them. The enemy had succeeded in disengaging himself almost completely from us, wherefore our cavalry accelerated their movements with the intention of getting close to the enemy, and as quickly as possible in order to prevent his demoralised troops from resting at night. We, too, got ready to march, and were just going to march off when we received orders to form camp. The camping ground was exactly mapped out, as was always the case, by the superior command, so that they would know where we were to be found in case of emergency. We had scarcely reached our camping grounds when our field-kitchen, which we thought had lost us, appeared before our eyes as if risen from out of the ground. The men of the field-kitchen, who had no idea of the losses we had suffered during the last days, had cooked for the old number of heads. They were therefore not a little surprised when they found, in the place of a

brave company of sturdy sappers, only a crowd of ragged men, the shadows of their former selves, broken and tired to their very bones. We were given canned soup, bread, meat, coffee, and a cigarette each. At last we were able to eat once again to our hearts' content. We could drink as much coffee as we liked. And then that cigarette, which appeared to most of us more important than eating and drinking!

All those fine things and the expectation of a few hours of rest in some potato-field aroused in us an almost childish joy. We were as merry as boys and as noisy as street urchins. "Oh, what a joy to be a soldier lad!"—that song rang out, subdued at first, then louder and louder. It died away quickly enough as one after the other laid down his tired head. We slept like the dead.

We could sleep till six o'clock the next morning. Though all of us lay on the bare ground it was with no little trouble that they succeeded in waking us up. That morning breakfast was excellent. We received requisitioned mutton, vegetables, bread, coffee, a cupful of wine, and some ham. The captain admonished us to stuff in well, for we had a hard day's march before us. At seven o'clock we struck camp. At the beginning of that march we were in fairly good humour. Whilst conversing we discovered that we had completely lost all

reckoning of time. Nobody knew whether it was Monday or Wednesday, whether it was the fifth or the tenth of the month. Subsequently the same phenomenon could be observed only in a still more noticeable way. A soldier in war never knows the date or day of the week. One day is like another. Whether it is Saturday, Thursday, or Sunday, it means always the same routine of murdering. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy!" "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work. But the seventh day—thou shalt not do any work." These, to our Christian rulers, are empty phrases. "Six days shalt thou murder and on the seventh day too."

When we halted towards noon near a large farm we had again to wait in vain for our field-kitchen. So we helped ourselves. We shot one of the cows grazing in the meadows, slit its skin without first letting off the blood, and each one cut himself a piece of meat. The meat, which was still warm, was roasted a little in our cooking-pots. By many it was also eaten raw with pepper and salt. That killing of cattle on our own hook was repeated almost daily. The consequence was that all suffered with their stomachs, for the meat was mostly still warm, and eating it without bread or other food did not agree with us. Still, the practice was continued. If a soldier was hungry and if he

found a pig, cow, or lamb during his period of rest, he would simply shoot the beast and cut off a piece for his own use, leaving the rest to perish.

On our march we passed a little town, between Attigny and Somme-Py, crowded with refugees. Many of the refugees were ill, and among their children an epidemic was raging which was infecting the little ones of the town. A German medical column had arrived a short time before us. They asked for ten sappers—the maids of all work in war-time—to assist them in their labours. I was one of the ten drafted off for that duty.

We were first taken by the doctors to a wonderfully arranged park in the centre of which stood a castle-like house, a French manor-house. The owner, a very rich Frenchman, lived there with his wife and an excessive number of servants. Though there was room enough in the palace for more than a hundred patients and refugees, that humane patriot refused to admit any one, and had locked and bolted the house and all entrances to the park. It did not take us long to force all the doors and make all the locks useless. The lady of the house had to take up quarters in two large rooms, but that beauty of a male aristocrat had to live in the garage, and had to put up with a bed of straw. In that way the high and mighty gentleman got a taste of the refugee life which so many

of his countrymen had to go through. He was given his food by one of the soldiers of the medical corps; it was nourishing food, most certainly too nourishing for our gentleman. One of my mates, a Socialist comrade, observed dryly: "It's at least a consolation that our own gang of junkers isn't any worse than that mob of French aristocrats; they are all of a kidney. If only the people were to get rid of the whole pack they wouldn't then have to tear each other to pieces any longer like wild beasts."

In the meantime our mates had roámed through the country and captured a large barrelful of honey. Each one had filled his cooking-pot with honey to the very brim and buckled it to his knapsack. The ten of us did likewise, and then we went off to find our section, with which we caught up in a short time. But we had scarcely marched a few hundred yards when we were pursued by bees, whose numbers increased by hundreds every minute. However much we tried to shake off the little pests their attentions grew worse and worse. Every one of us was stung; many had their faces swollen to such an extent that they were no longer able to see. The officers, who were riding some twenty yards in front of us, began to notice our slow movements. The "old man" came along, saw the bees and the swollen faces, but could not, of course, grasp the

meaning of it all until a sergeant proffered the necessary information. "Who's got honey in his cooking-pot?" the old chap cried angrily. "All of us," the sergeant replied. "You, too?" "Yes, captain." The old man was very wild, for he was not even able to deal out punishments. We had to halt and throw away the "accursed things," as our severe master called them. We helped each other to unbuckle the cooking-pots, and our sweet provisions were flung far away into the fields on both sides of the road. With the honey we lost our cooking utensils, which was certainly not a very disagreeable relief.

We continued our march in the burning noon-day sun. The ammunition column and other army sections which occupied the road gave the whirled-up dust no time to settle. All around us in the fields refugees were camping, living there like poor, homeless gypsies. Many came up to us and begged for a piece of dry bread.

Without halting we marched till late at night. Towards nine o'clock in the evening we found ourselves quite close to the town hall of Somme-Py. Here, in and about Somme-Py, fighting had started again, and we had received orders to take part in it to the north-west of the town.

IX

SOLDIERS SHOOTING THEIR OWN OFFICERS

It was dark already, and we halted once more. The ground around us was strewn with dead. In the middle of the road were some French batteries and munition wagons, with the horses still attached, but horses and men were dead. After a ten minutes' rest we started again. Marching more quickly, we now approached a small wood in which dismounted cavalry and infantry were waging a desperate hand-to-hand struggle with the enemy. So as to astonish the latter we had to rush in with a mighty yell. Under cover of darkness we had succeeded in getting to the enemy's rear. Taken by surprise by the unexpected attack and our war-whoop, most of the Frenchmen lifted their hands and begged for quarter, which was, however, not granted by the infuriated cavalrymen and infantry. When, on our side, now and then the murdering of defenceless men seemed to slacken, it was encouraged again by the loud commands of the officers. "No

quarter!" "Cut them all down!" Such were the orders of those estimable gentlemen, the officers.

We sappers, too, had to participate in the cold-blooded slaughtering of defenceless men. The French were defenceless because they threw away their arms and asked for quarter the moment that they recognised the futility of further resistance. But the officers then saw to it, as on many earlier and later occasions, that "too many prisoners were not made." The sapper carries a bayonet which must not be fixed to the rifle according to international agreement, because the back of that bayonet is an extremely sharp steel saw, three millimetres in thickness. In times of peace the sapper never does bayonet practice, the bayonet being exclusively reserved for mechanical purposes. But what does militarism care for international law! We here had to fix the saw, as had always been done since the beginning of the war. Humanity was a jest when one saw an opponent with the toothed saw in his chest, and the victim, who had long given up all resistance, endeavouring to remove the deadly steel from the wound. Often that terrible tool of murder had fastened itself so firmly in the victim's chest that the attacker, in order to get his bayonet back, had to place his foot on the chest of the miserable man and try with all his might to remove the weapon.

The dead and wounded lay everywhere covered with terrible injuries, and the crying of the wounded, which might soften a stone but not a soldier's heart, told of the awful pain which those " defenders of their country " had to suffer.

However, not all the soldiers approved of that senseless, that criminal murdering. Some of the " gentlemen " who had ordered us to massacre our French comrades were killed " by mistake " in the darkness of the night, by their own people of course. Such " mistakes " repeat themselves almost daily, and if I keep silence with regard to many such mistakes which I could relate, giving the exact name and place, the reader will know why.

During that night it was a captain and first lieutenant who met their fate. An infantryman who was serving his second year stabbed the captain through the stomach with his bayonet, and almost at the same time the first lieutenant got a stab in the back. Both men were dead in a few minutes. Those who did the deeds showed not the slightest signs of repentance, and not one of us felt inclined to reproach them; on the contrary, every one knew that despicable, brutal murderers had met their doom.

In this connection I must mention a certain incident which necessitates my jumping a little ahead of events. When on the following day

I conversed with a mate from my company and asked him for a loan of his pocket-knife, he drew from his pocket three cartridges besides his knife. I was surprised to find him carrying cartridges in his trousers pockets and asked him whether he had no room for them in his cartridge-case. "There's room enough," he replied, "but those three are meant for a particular purpose; there's a name inscribed on each of them." Some time after—we had meanwhile become fast friends—I inquired again after the three bullets. He had one of them left. I reflected and remembered two sergeants who had treated us like brutes in times of peace, whom we had hated as one could only hate slave-drivers. They had found their grave in French soil.

The murder did not cease as long as an opponent was alive. We were then ordered to see whether all the enemies lying on the ground were really dead or unable to fight. "Should you find one who pretends to be dead, he must be killed without mercy." That was the order we received for that tour of inspection. However, the soldiers, who had meanwhile quieted down a little and who had thus regained their senses, took no trouble to execute the shameful command. What the soldiers thought of it is shown by the remark of a man belonging to my company, who said, "Let's rather look if our two officers are quite dead; if not, we shall have

to kill them, too, without mercy." An order was an order, he added.

We now advanced quickly, but our participation was no longer necessary, for the whole line of the enemy retired and then faced us again, a mile and a quarter south-west of Somme-Py. Somme-Py itself was burning for the greater part, and its streets were practically covered with the dead. The enemy's artillery was still bombarding the place, and shells were falling all around us. Several hundred prisoners were gathered in the market-place. A few shells fell at the same time among the prisoners, but they had to stay where they were. An officer of my company, Lieutenant of the Reserve Neesen, observed humanely that that could not do any harm, for thus the French got a taste of their own shells. He was rewarded with some cries of shame. A Socialist comrade, a reservist, had the pluck to cry aloud: "Do you hear that, comrades? That's the noble sentiment of an exploiter; that fellow is the son of an Elberfeld capitalist and his father is a sweating-den keeper of the worst sort. When you get home again, do not forget what this capitalist massacre has taught you. Those prisoners are proletarians, are our brethren, and what we are doing here in the interest of that gang of capitalist crooks is a crime against our own body; it is murdering our own

brothers!" He was going to continue talking, but the sleuths were soon upon him, and he was arrested. He threw down his gun with great force; then he quietly suffered himself to be led away.

All of us were electrified. Not one spoke a word. One suddenly beheld quite a different world. We had a vision which kept our imagination prisoner. Was it true what we had heard—that those prisoners were not our enemies at all, that they were our brothers? That which formerly—oh, how long ago might that have been!—in times of peace had appeared to us as a matter of course had been forgotten; in war we had regarded our enemies as our friends and our friends as our enemies. Those words of the Elberfeld comrade had lifted the fog from our brains and from before our eyes. We had again a clear view; we could recognise things once more.

One looked at the other and nodded without speaking; each one felt that the brave words of our friend had been a boon to us, and none could refrain from inwardly thanking and appreciating the bold man. The man in front of me, who had been a patriot all along as far as I knew, but who was aware of my views, pressed my hand, saying: "Those few words have opened my eyes; I was blind; we are friends. Those words came at the proper time." Others again I heard remark:

" You can't surpass Schotes ; such a thing requires more courage than all of us together possess. For he knew exactly the consequences that follow when one tells the truth. Did you see the last look he gave us ? That meant as much as, ' Don't be concerned about me ; I shall fight my way through to the end. Be faithful workers ; remain faithful to your class ! ' "

The place, overcrowded with wounded soldiers, was almost entirely occupied by the Germans. The medical corps could not attend to all the work, for the wounded kept streaming in in enormous numbers. So we had to lend a helping hand, and bandaged friend and enemy to the best of our ability. But contrary to earlier times, when the wounded were treated considerately, things were now done more roughly.

The fighting to the south of the place had reached its greatest violence towards one o'clock in the afternoon, and when the Germans began to storm at all points, the French retired from their positions in the direction of Suippes.

Whether our ragged company was no longer considered able to fight or whether we were no longer required, I do not know ; but we got orders to seek quarters. We could find neither barn nor stable, so we had to camp in the open ; the houses were all crowded with wounded men.

On that day I was commanded to mount guard and was stationed with the camp guard. At that place arrested soldiers had to call to submit to the punishment inflicted on them. Among them were seven soldiers who had been sentenced to severe confinement, which consisted in being tied up for two hours.

The officer on guard ordered us to tie the "criminals" to trees in the neighbourhood. Every arrested soldier had to furnish for that purpose the rope with which he cleaned his rifle. The victim I had to attend to was Sapper Lohmer, a good Socialist. I was to tie his hands behind his back, wind the loose end of the rope round his chest, and tie him with his back towards the tree. In that position my comrade was to stand for two hours, exposed to the mockery of officers and sergeants. But Comrade Lohmer had been marching with the rest of us in a broiling sun for a whole day, had all night fought and murdered for the dear Fatherland which was now giving him thanks by tying him up with a rope.

I went up to him and told him that I would not tie him to the tree. "Do it, man," he tried to persuade me; "if you don't do it another one will. I shan't be cross with you, you know."

"Let others do it; I won't fetter you."

The officer, our old friend Lieutenant Spahn,

who was getting impatient, came up to us. "Can't you see that all the others have been seen to? How long do you expect me to wait?" I gave him a sharp look, but did not answer. Again he bellowed out the command to tie my comrade to the tree. I looked at him for a long time and did not deign him worthy of an answer. He then turned to the "criminal," who told him that I could not get myself to do the job as we were old comrades and friends. Besides, I did not want to fetter a man who was exhausted and dead tired. "So you won't do it?" he thundered at me, and when again he received no reply—for I was resolved not to speak another word to the fellow—he hissed, "That b—— is a Red to the marrow!" I shall never in my life forget the look of thankfulness that Lohmer gave me; it rewarded me for the unpleasantness I had in consequence of my refusal. Of course others did what I refused to do; I got two weeks' confinement. Naturally I was proud at having been a man for once at least. As a comrade I had remained faithful to my mate. Yet I had gained a point. They never ordered me again to perform such duty, and I was excluded from the guard that day. I could move about freely and be again a free man for a few hours.

The evening I had got off I employed to under-

take a reconnoitring expedition through the surrounding country in the company of several soldiers. We spoke about the various incidents of the day and the night, and, to the surprise, I dare say, of every one of us, we discovered that very little was left of the overflowing enthusiasm and patriotism that had seized so many during the first days of the war. Most of the soldiers made no attempt to conceal the feeling that we poor devils had absolutely nothing to gain in this war, that we had only to lose our lives, or, which was still worse, that we should sit at some street corner as crippled "war veterans" trying to arouse the pity of passers-by by means of some squeaking organ.

At that moment it was already clear to us, in view of the enormous losses, that no State, no public benevolent societies, would be able after the war to help the many hundreds of thousands who had sacrificed their health for their "beloved country." The number of the unfortunate wrecks is too great to be helped even with the best of intentions.

Those thoughts, which occupied our minds to an ever-increasing extent, did not acquire a more cheerful aspect on our walk. The wounded were lying everywhere, in stables, in barns, wherever there was room for them. If the wounds were not

too severe the wounded men were quite cheerful. They felt glad at having got off so cheaply, and thought the war would long be over when they should be well again. They lived by hopes just as the rest of us.

X

SACKING SUIPPES

THE inhabitants of the place who had not fled were all quartered in a large wooden shed. Their dwelling-places had almost all been destroyed, so that they had no other choice but live in the shed that was offered them. Only one little old woman sat, bitterly crying, on the ruins of her destroyed home, and nobody could induce her to leave that place.

In the wooden shed one could see women and men, youths, children, and old people, all in a great jumble. Many had been wounded by bits of shell or bullets; others had been burned by the fire. Everywhere one could observe the same terrible misery—sick mothers with half-starved babies for whom there was no milk on hand and who had to perish there; old people who were dying from the excitement and terrors of the last few days; men and women in the prime of their life who were slowly succumbing to their wounds because there was nobody present to care for them.

A soldier of the Landwehr, an infantryman, was standing close to me and looked horror-struck at some young mothers who were trying to satisfy the hunger of their babes. "I, too," he said reflectively, "have a good wife and two dear children at home. I can therefore feel how terrible it must be for the fathers of these poor families to know their dear ones are in the grip of a hostile army. The French soldiers think us to be still worse barbarians than we really are, and spread that impression through their letters among those left at home. I can imagine the fear in which they are of us everywhere. During the Boxer Rebellion I was in China as a soldier, but the slaughter in Asia was child's play in comparison to the barbarism of civilised European nations that I have had occasion to witness in this war in friend and foe." After a short while he continued: "I belong to the second muster of the Landwehr, and thought that at my age of thirty-seven it would take a long time before my turn came. But we old ones were no better off than you of the active army divisions —sometimes even worse. Just like you, we were sent into action right from the beginning, and the heavy equipment, the long marches in the scorching sun, meant much hardship to our worn-out proletarian bodies, so that many amongst us thought they would not be able to live through it all.

"How often have I not wished that at least one of my children were a boy? But to-day I am glad and happy that they are girls; for, if they were boys, they would have to shed their blood one day or spill that of others, only because our rulers demand it." We now became well acquainted with each other. Conversing with him I got to know that dissatisfaction was still more general in his company than in mine, and that it was only the ruthless infliction of punishment, the iron discipline, that kept the men of the Landwehr, who had to think of wife and children, from committing acts of insubordination. Just as we were treated they treated those older men for the slightest breach of discipline; they were tied with ropes to trees and telegraph poles.

Dear Fatherland, may peace be thine;
Fast stands and firm the Watch on Rhine.

A company of the Hessian Landwehr, all of them old soldiers, were marching past with sore feet and drooping heads. They had probably marched for a long while. Officers were attempting to liven them up. They were to sing a song, but the Hessians, fond of singing and good-natured as they certainly are known to be, were by no means in a mood to sing. "I tell you to sing, you swine!" the officer cried, and the pitifully helpless-looking "swine" endeavoured to obey the command.

Here and there a thin voice from the ranks of the overtired men could be heard to sing, "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt." With sore feet and broken energy, full of disgust with their "glorious" trade of warriors, they sang that symphony of super-Germanism that sounded then like blasphemy, nay, like a travesty —"Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt."

Some of my mates who had watched the procession like myself came up to me saying, "Come, let's go to the bivouac. Let's sleep, forget, and think no more."

We were hungry, and going "home" we caught some chicken, "candidates for the cooking-pot," as we used to call them. They were eaten half cooked. Then we lay down in the open and slept till four o'clock in the morning, when we had to be ready to march off. Our goal for that day was Suippes. Before starting on the march an army order was read out to us. "Soldiers," it said, "His Majesty the Emperor, our Supreme War Lord, thanks the soldiers of the Fourth Army, and expresses to all his Imperial thankfulness and appreciation. You have protected our dear Germany from the invasion of hostile hordes. We shall not rest until the last opponent lies beaten on the ground, and before the leaves fall from the trees

we shall be at home again as victors. The enemy is in full retreat, and the Almighty will continue to bless our arms."

Having duly acknowledged receipt of the message by giving those three cheers for the "Supreme War Lord" which had become almost a matter of daily routine, we started on our march and had now plenty of time and opportunity to talk over the Imperial "thankfulness." We were not quite clear as to the "fatherland" we had to "defend" here in France. One of the soldiers thought the chief thing was that God had blessed our arms, whereupon another one, who had been president of a free-thinking religious community in his native city for many a long year, replied that a religious man who babbled such stuff was committing blasphemy if he had ever taken religion seriously.

All over the fields and in the ditches lay the dead bodies of soldiers, whose often sickening wounds were terrible to behold. Thousands of big flies, of which that part of the country harbours great swarms, were covering the human corpses, which had partly begun to decompose and were spreading a stench that took away one's breath. In between these corpses, in the burning sun, the poor, helpless refugees were camping, because they were not allowed to use the road as long as the troops were

occupying it. But when were the roads not occupied by troops !

Once, when resting, we chanced to observe a fight between three French and four German aeroplanes. We heard above us the well-known hum of a motor and saw three French and two German machines approach one another. All of them were at a great altitude when all at once we heard the firing of machine-guns high up in the air. The two Germans were screwing themselves higher up, unceasingly peppered by their opponents, and were trying to get above the Frenchmen. But the French, too, rose in great spirals in order to frustrate the intentions of the Germans. Suddenly one of the German flying-men threw a bomb and set alight a French machine, which at the same time was enveloped in flames, and, toppling over, fell headlong to the ground a few seconds after. Burning rags came slowly fluttering to the ground after it. Unexpectedly two more strong German machines appeared on the scene, and then the Frenchmen took to flight immediately, but not before they had succeeded in disabling a German Rumpler-Taube by machine-gun fire to such an extent that the damaged aeroplane had to land in a steep glide. The other undamaged machines disappeared on the horizon.

That terrible and beautiful spectacle had taken

a few minutes. It was a small, unimportant episode, which had orphaned a few children, widowed a woman—somewhere in France.

In the evening we reached the little town of Suippes after a long march. The captain said to us, "Here in Suippes there are swarms of *francs-tireurs*. We shall therefore not take quarters but camp in the open. Anybody going to the place has to take his rifle and ammunition with him." After recuperating a little we went to the town in order to find something to eat. Fifteen dead civilians were lying in the middle of the road. They were inhabitants of the place. Why they had been shot we could not learn. A shrugging of the shoulders was the only answer one could get from anybody. The town itself, the houses, showed no external damage.

I have never in war witnessed a greater general pillaging than here in Suippes. It was plain that we had to live and had to have food. The inhabitants and storekeepers having fled, it was often impossible to pay for the things one needed. Men simply went into some store, put on socks and underwear, and left their old things; they then went to some other store, took the food they fancied, and hied themselves to a wine-cellar to provide themselves to their hearts' content. The men of the ammunition trains who had their

quarters in the town, as also the men of the transport and ambulance corps and troopers, went by the hundred to search the homes and took whatsoever pleased them most. The finest and largest stores—Suippes supplied a large tract of country and had comparatively extensive stores of all descriptions—were empty shells in a few hours. Whilst men were looking for one thing others were ruined and broken. The drivers of the munition and transport trains dragged away whole sackfuls of the finest silk, ladies' garments, linen, boots, and shoved them in their shot-case. Children's shoes, ladies' shoes, everything was taken along, even if it had to be thrown away again soon after. Later on, when the field-post was running regularly, many things acquired in that manner were sent home. But all parcels did not reach their destination on account of the unreliable service of the field-post, and the maximum weight that could be sent proved another obstacle. Thus a pair of boots had to be divided and each sent in a separate parcel if they were to be dispatched by field-post. One of our sappers had for weeks carried about with him a pair of handsome boots for his fiancée, and then had them sent to her in two parcels. However, the field-post did not guarantee delivery; and thus the war bride got the left boot and not the right one.

An important chocolate factory was completely sacked, chocolates and candy lay about in heaps trodden underfoot. Private dwellings that had been left by their inhabitants were broken into, the wine-cellars were cleared of their contents, and the windows were smashed—a speciality of the cavalry.

As we had to spend the night in the open we tried to procure some blankets, and entered a grocer's store in the market-place. The store had been already partly demolished. The living-rooms above it had remained, however, untouched, and all the rooms had been left unlocked. It could be seen that a woman had had charge of that house; everything was arranged in such a neat and comfortable way that one was immediately seized by the desire to become also possessed of such a lovely little nest. But all was surpassed by a room of medium size where a young lady had apparently lived. Only with great reluctance we entered that sanctum. To our surprise we found hanging on the wall facing the door a caustic drawing on wood bearing the legend in German: "Ehret die Frauen, sie flechten und weben himmlische Rosen ins irdische Leben." (Honour the women, they work and they weave heavenly roses in life's short reprieve.) The occupant was evidently a young bride, for the various pieces of the trousseau,

trimmed with dainty blue ribbons, could be seen in the wardrobes in a painfully spick and span condition. All the wardrobes were unlocked. We did not touch a thing. We were again reminded of the cruelty of war. Millions it turned into beggars in one night ; the fondest hopes and desires were destroyed. When, the next morning, we entered the house again, driven by a presentiment of misfortune, we found everything completely destroyed. Real barbarians had been raging here, who had lost that thin varnish with which civilisation covers the brute in man. The whole trousseau of the young bride had been dragged from the shelves and was still partly covering the floor. Portraits, photographs, looking-glasses, all lay broken on the floor. Three of us had entered the room, and all three of us clenched our fists in helpless rage.

Having received the command to remain in Suippes till further orders we could observe the return of many refugees the next day. They came back in crowds from the direction of Châlons-sur-Marne, and found a wretched, dreary waste in the place of their peaceful homes. The owner of a dry-goods store was just returning as we stood before his house. He collapsed before the door of his house, for nothing remained of his business. We went up to the man. He was a Hebrew and spoke

German. After having somewhat recovered his self-possession he told us that his business had contained goods to the value of more than 8000 francs, and said: "If the soldiers had only taken what they needed I should have been content, for I expected nothing less; but I should have never believed of the Germans that they would destroy all of my possessions." In his living-rooms there was not even a cup to be found. The man had a wife and five children, but did not know where they were at that time. And his fate was shared by uncounted others, here and elsewhere.

I should tell an untruth if I were to pretend that his misery touched me very deeply. It is true that the best among us—and those were almost always the men who had been active in the labour movement at home, who hated war and the warrior's trade from the depth of their soul—were shaken out of their lethargy and indifference by some especially harrowing incident, but the mass was no longer touched even by great tragedies. When a man is accustomed to step over corpses with a cold smile on his lips, when he has to face death every minute day and night, he gradually loses that finer feeling for human things and humanity. Thus it must not surprise one that soldiers could laugh and joke in the midst of awful devastation, that they brought wine to a concert-room in which

there was a piano and an electric organ, and had a joyful time with music and drinking. They drank till they were unconscious ; they drank with sergeants and corporals, pledging " brotherhood " ; and they rolled arm in arm through the streets with their new " comrades."

The officers would see nothing of this, for they did not behave much better themselves, even if they knew how to arrange things in such a manner that their " honour " did not entirely go to the devil. The " gentleman " of an officer sends his orderly out to buy him twenty bottles of wine, but as he does not give his servant any money wherewith to " buy," the orderly obeys the command the best he can. He knows that at any rate he must not come back without the wine. In that manner the officers provide themselves with all possible comforts without losing their " honour." We had five officers in our company who for themselves alone needed a wagon with four horses for transporting their baggage. As for ourselves, the soldiers, our knapsack was still too large for the objects we needed for our daily life.

XI

MARCHING TO THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE: INTO THE TRAP

A LARGE proportion of the "gentlemen," our officers, regarded war as a pleasant change to their enchanting social life in the garrison towns, and knew exactly (at least as far as the officers of my company were concerned) how to preserve their lives as long as possible "in the interest of the Fatherland." When I buried the hatchet, fourteen months after, our company had lost three times its original strength, but no fresh supply of officers had as yet become necessary; we had not lost a single officer. In Holland I got to know, some months later, that after having taken my "leave" they were still very well preserved. One day, at Rotterdam, I saw a photo in the magazine *Die Woche*, showing "Six members of the 1st Company of the Sapper Regiment No. 30 with the Iron Cross of the 1st Class." The picture had been taken at the Front, and showed the five officers and Corporal Bock with the Iron Cross of the

1st Class. Unfortunately Scherl* did not betray whether those gentlemen had got the distinction for having preserved their lives for further service.

We spent the following night at the place, and then had to camp again in the open, "because the place swarmed with *francs-tireurs*." In reality no *francs-tireurs* could be observed, so that it was quite clear to us that it was merely an attempt to arouse again our resentment against the enemy, which was dying down. They knew very well that a soldier is far more tractable and pliant when animated by hatred against the "enemy."

The next day Châlons-sur-Marne was indicated as the next goal of our march. That day was one of the most fatiguing we experienced. Early in the morning, when we started, the sun was already sending down its fiery shafts. Suippes is about twenty-one miles distant from Châlons-sur-Marne. The distance would not have been the worst thing, in spite of the heat. We had marched longer distances before. But that splendid road from Suippes to Châlons does not deviate an inch to the right or left, so that the straight, almost endless-seeming road lies before one like an immense white snake. However far we marched that white ribbon showed no ending, and when one looked round, the view was exactly the same. During the whole

* A proprietor of many German sensational newspapers.

march we only passed one little village ; otherwise all was bare and uncultivated.

Many of us fainted or got a heat-stroke and had to be taken along by the following transport column. We could see by the many dead soldiers, French and German, whose corpses were lying about all along the road, that the troops who had passed here before us had met with a still worse fate.

We had finished half of our march without being allowed to take a rest. I suppose the " old man " was afraid the machine could not be set going again if once our section had got a chance to rest their tired limbs on the ground, and thus we crawled along, dispirited, like a lot of snails, carrying the leaden weight of the " monkey " in the place of a house. The monotony of the march was only somewhat relieved when we reached the immense camp of Châlons. It is one of the greatest military camps in France. Towards three o'clock in the afternoon we beheld Châlons in the distance, and when we halted towards four o'clock in an orchard outside the town, all of us, without an exception, fell down exhausted.

The field-kitchen, too, arrived, but nobody stirred for a time to fetch food. We ate later on, and then desired to go to the town to buy several things, chiefly, I dare say, tobacco, which we missed terribly. Nobody was allowed, however, to leave

camp. We were told that it was strictly forbidden to enter the town. Châlons, so the tale went, had paid a war contribution, and nobody could enter the town. With money you can do everything, even in war. Mammon had saved Châlons from pillage.

Far away could be heard the muffled roar of the guns. We had the presentiment that our rest would not be of long duration. The rolling of the gun-firing became louder and louder, but we did not know yet that a battle had started here that should turn out a very unfortunate one for the Germans—the five days' battle of the Marne.

At midnight we were aroused by an alarm, and half an hour later we were already on the move. The cool air of the night refreshed us, and we got along fairly rapidly in spite of our exhaustion. At about four o'clock in the morning we reached the village of Chepy. At that place friend Mammon had evidently not been so merciful as at Châlons, for Chepy had been thoroughly sacked. We rested for a short time, and noticed with a rapid glance that preparations were just being made to shoot two *francs-tireurs*. They were little peasants who were alleged to have hidden from the Germans a French machine-gun and its crew. The sentence was carried out. One was never at a loss in finding

reasons for a verdict. And the population had been shown who their "master" was.

The little village of Songy, half-way between Châlons-sur-Marne and Vitry-le-François, had fared no better than Chepy, as we observed when we entered it at nine o'clock in the morning. We had now got considerably nearer to the roaring guns. The slightly wounded who were coming back and the men of the ammunition columns told us that a terrible battle was raging to the west of Vitry-le-François. At four o'clock in the afternoon we reached Vitry-le-François, after a veritable forced march. The whole town was crowded with wounded; every building, church, and school was full of wounded soldiers. The town itself was not damaged.

Here things must have looked very bad for the Germans, for, without allowing us a respite, we were ordered to enter the battle to the west of Vitry-le-François. We had approached the firing-line a little more than two miles when we got within reach of the enemy's curtain of fire. A terrific hail of shells was ploughing up every foot of ground. Thousands of corpses of German soldiers were witnesses of the immense losses the Germans had suffered in bringing up all available reserves. The French tried their utmost to prevent the Germans from bringing in their reserves, and

increased their artillery-fire to an unheard-of violence.

It seemed impossible for us to break through that barricade of fire. Hundreds of shells were bursting every minute. We were ordered to pass that hell singly and at a running pace. We were lying on the ground and observed how the first of our men tried to get through. Some ran forward like mad, not heeding the shells that were bursting around them, and got through. Others were entirely buried by the dirt dug up by the shells or were torn to pieces by shell splinters. Two men had scarcely reached the line when they were struck by a bull's-eye, i.e. the heavy shell exploded at their feet, leaving nothing of them.

Who can imagine what we were feeling during those harrowing minutes as we lay crouching on the ground not quite a hundred feet away, seeing everything, and only waiting for our turn to come! One had entangled oneself in a maze of thoughts. Suddenly one of the officers would cry, "The next one!" That was I! Just as if roused out of a bad dream, I jump up and race away like mad, holding the rifle in my right hand and the bayonet in my left. I jump aside a few steps in front of two bursting shells and run into two others which are bursting at the same time. I leap back several times, run forward again, race about wildly to find

a gap through which to escape. But—fire and iron everywhere. Like a hunted beast one seeks some opening to save oneself. Hell is in front of me and behind me the officer's revolver, kept ready to shoot. . . . The lumps of steel fall down like a heavy shower from high above. Hell and damnation! I blindly run and run and run, until somebody gets me by my coat. "We're there!" somebody roars into my ear. "Stop! Are you wounded? Have a look; perhaps you are and don't know it!" Here I am trembling all over. "Sit down; you will feel better; we trembled too." Slowly I became more quiet. One after the other arrived; many were wounded. We were about forty when the sergeants took over the command. Again nothing was to be seen of the officers.

We proceeded and passed several German batteries. Many had suffered great losses. The crews were lying dead or wounded around their demolished guns. Others again could not fire as they had no more ammunition. We rested. Some men of the artillery who had "nothing to do" for lack of ammunition came up to us. A sergeant asked why they did not fire. "Because we have used up all our ammunition," a gunner replied. "Oh yes, it would be quite impossible to bring up ammunition through that curtain of fire." "It's not that," announced the gunner; "it's because

there isn't any more that they can't bring it up!" And then he went on: "We started at Neufchâteau to drive the French before us like hunted beasts; we rushed headlong after them like savages. Men and beasts were used up in the heat; all the destroyed railroads and means of transportation could not be repaired in those few days; everything was left in the condition we found it; and in a wild intoxication of victory we ventured to penetrate into the heart of France. We rushed on without thinking or caring, all the lines of communication in our rear were interrupted —we confidently marched into the traps the French set for us. Before the first ammunition and the other accessories, which had all to be transported by wagon, have reached us we shall all be done for."

Up to that time we had had blind confidence in the invincible strategy of our "Great General Staff," and now they told us this. We simply did not believe it. And yet it struck us that the French (as was made clear by everything around us) were in their own country, in the closest proximity of their largest depot, Paris, and were in possession of excellent railway communications. The French were, besides, maintaining a terrible artillery-fire with guns of such a large size as had never yet been used by them. All that led to the conclusion

that they had taken up positions prepared long before, and that the French guns had been placed in such a manner that we could not reach them.

In spite of all we continued to believe that the gunner had seen things in too dark a light. We were soon to be taught better.

XII

AT THE MARNE: IN THE MAW OF DEATH

We got in the neighbourhood of the line of defence, and were received by a rolling fire from the machine-guns. We went up to the improvised trenches that were to protect us, at the double-quick. It was raining hard. The fields around were covered with dead and wounded men who impeded the work of the defenders. Many of the wounded contracted tetanus in consequence of contact with the clayey soil, for most of them had not been bandaged. They all begged for water and bread, but we had none ourselves. In fact they implored us to give them a bit of bread. They had been in that hell for two days without having eaten a mouthful.

We had scarcely been shown our places when the French began to attack in mass formation. The occupants of those trenches, who had already beaten back several of those attacks, spurred us on to shoot and then began to fire themselves into the on-rushing crowd as if demented. Amidst the

shouting and the noise one could hear the cries of the officers of the infantry: "Fire! Fire! More lively!" We fired until the barrels of our rifles became quite hot. The enemy turned to flee. The heap of victims lying between us and our opponents had again been augmented by hundreds. The attack had been beaten back.

It was dark, and it rained and rained. From all directions one heard in the darkness the wounded calling, crying, and moaning. The wounded we had with us were likewise moaning and crying. All wanted to have their wounds dressed, but we had no more bandages. We tore off pieces of our dirty shirts and placed the rags on those sickening wounds. Men were dying one after the other. There were no doctors, no bandages; we had nothing whatever. You had to help the wounded and keep the French off at the same time. It was an unbearable, impossible state of things. It rained harder and harder. We were wet to our skins. We fired blindly into the darkness. The rolling fire of rifles increased, then died away, then increased again. We sappers were placed among the infantry. My neighbour gave me a dig in the ribs. "I say," he called out.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Who are you?"

"A sapper."

"Come here," he hissed. "It gives you an uncanny feeling to be alone in this hell of a night. Why are you here too? They'll soon come again, those over there; then there'll be fine fun again. Do you hear the others cry?"

He laughed. Suddenly he began again: "I always shoot at those until they leave off crying —that's great fun."

Again he laughed, that time more shrilly than before.

I knew what was the matter. He had become insane. A man passed with ammunition. I begged him to go at once and fetch the section leader. The leader, a lieutenant of the infantry, came up. I went to meet him and told him that my neighbour was continually firing at the wounded, was talking nonsense, and was probably insane. The lieutenant placed himself between us. "Can you see anything?" he asked the other man. "What? See? No; but I hear them moaning and crying, and as soon as I hit one—well, he is quiet, he goes to sleep——" The lieutenant nodded at me. He took the gun away from the man. But the latter snatched it quickly away again and jumped out of the trench. From there he fired into the crowd of wounded men until, a few seconds after, he dropped down riddled by several bullets.

The drama had only a few spectators. It was

scarcely over when it was forgotten again. That was no place to become sentimental. We continued shooting without any aim. The crying of the wounded became louder and louder. Why was that so? Those wounded men, lying between the two fighting lines, were exposed to the aimless fire of both sides. Nobody could help them, for it would have been madness to venture between the lines. Louder and more imploring became the voices that were calling out, "Stretcher-bearer! Help! Help! Water!" For answer they got at most a curse or a malediction.

Our trench was filled with water for about a foot —water and mud. The dead and wounded lay in that mire where they had dropped. We had to make room. So we threw the dead out of the trench. At one o'clock in the night people came with stretchers and took away part of the wounded. But there was no help at all for the poor fellows between the lines.

To fill the cup of misery, we received orders, in the course of the night, to attack the enemy's lines at 4.15 o'clock in the morning. At the time fixed, in a pouring rain, we got ready for storming. Received by a terrible fire from the machine-guns we had to turn back half-way. Again we had sacrificed uselessly a great number of men. Scarcely had we arranged ourselves again in our trench

when the French began a new attack. They got as far as three yards from our trenches when their attack broke down under our fire. They, too, had to go back with enormous losses. Three times more the French attacked within two hours, each time suffering great losses and achieving not the slightest success.

We did not know what to do. If help did not arrive soon it would be impossible for us to maintain our position. We were tormented by hunger and thirst, were wet to the skin, and tired enough to drop down. At ten o'clock the French attacked a fourth time. They came up in immense masses. Our leaders recognised at last the danger in which we were and withdrew us. We retreated in waves, abandoning the wounded and our material. By exerting our whole strength we succeeded in saving the machine-guns and ammunition. We went back a thousand yards and established ourselves again in old trenches. The officers called to us that we should have to stay there whatever happened; reinforcements would soon come up. The machine-guns were in their emplacements in a jiffy. Our opponents, who were following us, were immediately treated to a hail of bullets. Their advance stopped at once. Encouraged by that success we continued firing more wildly than ever, so that the French were obliged to seek cover. The reinforcements

we had been promised did not arrive. Some 800 yards behind us were six German batteries, which, however, maintained but a feeble fire.

An officer of the artillery appeared in our midst and asked the commander of our section whether it would not be wise to withdraw the batteries. He said he had been informed by telephone that the whole German line was wavering. Before the commander had time to answer another attack in mass formation took place, the enemy being five or seven times as numerous as we were. As if by command, we quitted our position without having been told to do so, completely demoralised; we retired in full flight, leaving the six batteries (36 guns) to the enemy. Our opponent had ceased his curtain of fire, fearing to endanger his own advancing troops. The Germans used that moment to bring into battle reinforcements composed of a medley of all arms. Portions of scattered infantry, dismounted cavalry, sappers without a lord and master, all had been drummed together to fill the ranks. Apparently there were no longer any proper complete reserve formations on that day of battle.

Again we got the order, "Turn! Attention!" The unequal fight started again. We observed how the enemy made preparations to carry off the captured guns. We saw him advance to the assault. He received us with the bayonet. We

fought like wild animals. For minutes there was bayonet fighting of a ferocity that defies description. We stabbed and hit like madmen—through the chest, the abdomen, no matter where. There was no semblance of regular bayonet fighting; that, by the way, can only be practised in the barrack-yard. The butt-ends of our rifles swished through the air. Every skull that came in our way was smashed in. We had lost helmets and knapsacks. In spite of his great numerical superiority the enemy could not make headway against our little barrier of raving humanity. We forgot all around us and fought bloodthirstily without any calculation. A portion of our fellows had broken through the ranks of the enemy, and fought for the possession of the guns.

Our opponent recognised the danger that was threatening him and retired, seeking with all his might to retain the captured guns. We did not allow ourselves to be shaken off, and bayoneted the retiring foes one after the other. But the whole mass of the enemy gathered again round the guns. Every gun was surrounded by corpses, every minute registered numerous victims. The artillery who took part in the fight attempted to remove the breech-blocks of the guns. To my right, around the third gun, three Germans were still struggling with four Frenchmen; all the others were lying on

the ground dead or wounded. Near that one gun were about seventy dead or wounded men. A sapper could be seen before the mouth of the gun. With astonishing coolness he was stuffing into the mouth of that gun one hand-grenade after another. He then lit the fuse and ran away. Friends and enemies were torn into a thousand shreds by the terrible explosion that followed. The gun was entirely demolished. Seventy or eighty men had slaughtered each other for nothing—absolutely nothing.

After a struggle lasting nearly an hour all the guns were again in our possession. Who can imagine the enormous loss of human lives with which those lost guns had been recaptured! The dead and wounded, infantry, cavalry, sappers and artillery, together with the Frenchmen, hundreds and hundreds of them, were covering the narrow space, that comparatively small spot which had been the scene of the tragedy.

We were again reinforced, that time by four regular companies of infantry, which had been taken from another section of the battle-field. Though one takes part in everything, one's view as an individual is very limited, and one has no means of informing oneself about the situation in general. Here, too, we found ourselves in a similar situation. But those reinforcements composed of

all arms, and the later arrivals, who had been taken from a section just as severely threatened as our own, gave us the presentiment that we could only resist further attacks if fresh troops arrived soon. If only we could get something to quiet the pangs of hunger and that atrocious thirst!

The horses now arrived at a mad gallop to take away the guns. At the same moment the enemy's artillery opened a murderous fire, with all sizes of guns, on that column of more than thirty teams that were racing along. Confusion arose. The six horses of the various teams reared and fled in all directions, drawing the overturned limbers behind them with wheels uppermost. Some of the maddest animals ran straight into the hottest fire to be torn to pieces together with their drivers. Then our opponent directed his fire on the battery positions, which were also our positions. We had no other choice—we had either to advance or retire. Retire? No! The order was different. We were to recapture our lost first positions, now occupied by the French, who were probably getting ready for another attack. Had we not received fresh food for cannon so that the mad dance could begin again? We advanced across a field covered with thousands upon thousands of torn and bleeding human bodies.

No shot was fired. Only the enemy's artillery

was still bombarding the battery positions. We were still receiving no fire from the artillery; neither did the enemy's infantry fire upon us. That looked suspicious; we knew what was coming. We advanced farther and farther without being molested. Suddenly we found ourselves attacked by an army of machine-guns. An indescribable hail of bullets was poured into us. We threw ourselves to the ground and sought cover as well as we could. "Jump forward! March, march!" Again we ran to meet our fate. Already we had lost more than a third of our men. We halted again, exhausted. Scarcely had we had time to take up a position when we were attacked both in front and the flank. We had no longer strength enough to withstand successfully a simultaneous frontal and flank attack. Besides, we were being almost crushed by superior numbers. Our left wing had been completely cut off, and we observed our people on that wing raising their hands to indicate that they considered themselves prisoners of war.

We in the centre could give them no help. We were getting less from minute to minute. "Revenge for Somme-Py!" I heard it ringing in my ears. The right wing turned, drew us along, and a wild stampede began. Our direct retreat being cut off, we ran backwards across the open field, every one for himself, with beating hearts that

seemed ready to burst, all the time under the enemy's fire.

After a long run we reached a small village to the north-east of Vitry-le-François. There we arrived—without rifles, helmets, or knapsacks—one after the other. But only a small portion could save themselves. The French took plenty of booty. All the guns we fought for were lost, besides several others. Of the hundreds of soldiers there remained scarcely one hundred. All the others were dead, wounded, or missing. Who knew ?

Was that the terrible German war machine ? Were those the cowardly, degenerated Frenchmen whom we had driven before us for days ? No ; it was war, terrible, horrid war, in which fortune is fickle. To-day it smiles upon you ; to-morrow the other fellow's turn comes.

We sought to form up again in companies. There were just twelve men left of our company. One by one others came up from different directions until at last we counted twenty. Then every one began to ask questions eagerly ; every one wanted to know about his friend, mate, or acquaintance. Nobody could give an answer, for every one of us had been thinking merely of himself and of nobody else. Driven by hunger we roamed about the place. But our first action was drinking water, and that

in such quantities as if we wanted to drink enough for a lifetime. We found nothing to eat. Only here and there in a garden we discovered a few turnips, which we swallowed with a ravenous appetite without washing or even cleaning them superficially.

But where was our company? Nobody knew. We were the company, the twenty of us. And the officers? "Somewhere," a soldier observed, "somewhere in a bomb-proof shelter." What were we to do? We did not know. Soon after a sergeant-major of the field gendarmes came up sitting proudly on his steed. Those "defenders of the Fatherland" have to see to it that too many "shirkers" do not "loiter" behind the Front. "You are sappers, aren't you?" he roared out. "What are you doing here? 30th Regiment?" He put a great many questions, which we answered as well as we were able to. "Where are the others?" "Over there," said a young Berliner, and pointed to the battle-field, "dead or prisoners; maybe some have saved themselves and are elsewhere!" "It doesn't matter," roared out our fierce sergeant-major, for whom the conversation began to become unpleasant. "Wait till I come back." "Where are the officers?" Again nobody could answer him. "What are their names? I dare say I shall find them. Maybe they are at

Vitry." We gave him their names—Captain Menke, First Lieutenant Maier, Lieutenants of the Reserve Spahn, Neesen, and Heimbach. He gave us a certificate with which to prove the purpose of our "loitering" to other overseers and disappeared. "Let's hope the horse stumbles and the fellow breaks his neck." That was the pious wish which one of our chaps sent after him.

We went into one of the houses that had been pillaged like all the rest, lay down on mattresses that were lying about the rooms, and slept—slept like dormice.

XIII

THE ROUT OF THE MARNE

None of us knew how long we had slept ; we only knew that it was night. Some men of our company had waked us up. They had been looking for us for a long time. " Come along," they said ; " the ' old man ' is outside and making a hell of a row. He has got seventeen men together and is swearing like a trooper because he can't find you." Drowsily and completely bereft of any will-power of our own we trudged after them. We knew we were again being sent forward. But we did not care ; we had lost all balance. Never before had I noticed such indifference on our part as on that night.

There the " old man " was standing. He saw us coming up, without headgear, the uniforms all torn to tatters, and minus our knapsacks. He received us with the greeting, " Where have you been, you boobies ? " Nobody answered. What did we care ? Things could not get any worse than they were. Though all of us resented the wrong done to us we all remained silent.

"Where is your equipment? Lost?—Lost? That's a fine story. You rag-tag miserable vagabonds. If they were all like you——" For a while he went on in that style. That pretty fellow had suffered the "miserable vagabonds" to go forward while he himself had been defending his "Fatherland" at Vitry, three or four miles behind the front. We picked out the best from among the rifles that were lying about, and soon we were again "ready for battle."

We were standing half asleep, leaning on the barrel of our rifles and waiting to be led forth again to slaughter, when a shot was fired right in our midst. The bullet had shattered the entire right hand of a "spoiled ensign," as the officers express themselves. His hand was bandaged. "How did that happen?" asked the officers. An eye-witness related the incident, saying: "Like all of us he had his hand on the mouth of the barrel when it happened; I did not see any more." "Had he secured the gun? Don't you know that it is forbidden to lean with your hand on the mouth of your rifle when it is loaded?" Then turning to the "spoiled ensign," who was writhing with pain, he bawled at him: "I shall report you for punishment on account of gross negligence and self-mutilation on the battle-field!"

We all knew what was the matter. The ensign

was a sergeant, but a poor devil. He was fully aware that he had no career before him. We soldiers liked him because we knew that military life disgusted him. Though he was a sergeant he chose his companions solely among the common soldiers. We would have divided with him our last crust of bread, because to us especially he behaved like a fellow-man. We also knew how harshly he was treated by his superiors, and wondered that the "accident" had not happened before. I do not know whether he was placed before a court-martial later on. Punishments for self-mutilation are the order of the day, and innumerable men are being severely punished. Now and then the verdicts are made known to the soldiers at the front to serve as a deterrent. The people at home, however, will hear very little of them.

The captain passed on the command to the acting officer, and then the "old man" disappeared again in the direction of Vitry. He spurred on his steed, and away he flew. One of the soldiers thought that the captain's horse was a thousand times better off than we were. We knew it. We knew that we were far below the beast and were being treated accordingly.

We marched off and halted at the north-western exit of the village. There we met sappers gathered

from other companies and battalions, and our company was brought up to 85 men. The acting officer then explained to us that we should not be led into the firing-line that day; our only task was to watch that German troops fighting on the other side of the Marne should find the existing bridges in order in case they had to retreat. We marched to the place where the Saulx enters the Marne.

So we marched off and reached our destination towards six o'clock in the morning. The dead were lying in heaps around us in every field; death had gathered in a terrible harvest. We were lying on a wooded height on our side of the Marne, and were able to overlook the country for many miles in front of us. One could see the explosions of the shells that were raining down by the thousand. Little—almost nothing—was to be seen of the men, and yet there were thousands in front of us who were fighting a desperate battle. Little by little we could make out the faint outline of the struggle. The Germans were about a mile and a half behind the Marne in front of us. Near the banks of the Marne large bodies of German cavalry were stationed. There were only two tumble-down bridges constructed of make-shift materials. They stood ready to be blown up, and had plenty of explosive matter (dynamite) attached to them. The electrical

priming wires led to our position ; we were in charge of the firing apparatus. Connected by telephone we were able to blow up the bridges in an instant.

On the other side things began to get lively. We saw the French at various places pressing forward and flowing back again. The rifle-fire increased continually in violence, and the attacks became more frequent. Two hours passed in that way. We saw the French bringing up reinforcement after reinforcement, in spite of the German artillery, which was maintaining but a feeble fire. After a long pause the enemy began to attack again. The French came up in several lines. They attacked several times, and each time they had to go back again ; each time they suffered great losses. At about three o'clock in the afternoon our troops, attacked by the enemy with all his strength, began to give ground, slowly at first, then in a sort of flight. Our exhausted men could no longer withstand the blow dealt with enormous force. In a wild stampede all of them tried at the same time to reach safety across the bridges. The cavalry, too, who were in cover near the banks of the river, rushed madly to the bridges. An enormous crowd of men and beasts got wedged before the bridges. In a trice the bridge before us was thickly covered with human beings, all of whom were trying to reach the opposite side in a mad

rush. We thought we could notice the temporary bridge sway under its enormous burden. Like ourselves, the acting officer could overlook the whole country. He pressed the receiver of the telephone convulsively to his left ear, his right hand being on the firing apparatus, after which another man was looking. With bated breath he gazed fixedly into the fleeing crowds. "Let's hope the telephone is in order," he said to himself at intervals. He knew as well as we did that he had to act as soon as the sharp order was transmitted by telephone. It was not much he had to do. Directed by a movement of the hand the man in charge of the apparatus would turn a key that looked like a winged screw—and all would be over.

The crowds were still rushing across the bridge, but nearly half of our men, almost the whole of the cavalry, were still on the other side. The bridge farther up was not being used so much and nearly all had reached safety in that portion of the battle-field. We observed the foremost French cross that bridge, but the bridge remained intact. The sergeant-major who was in charge of the other apparatus was perplexed as he received no order; so he blew up that bridge on his own responsibility, sending hundreds of Frenchmen to their watery grave in the river Marne.

At the same moment the acting officer next to

me received the command to blow up the second and last bridge. He was confused and hesitated to pass on the order. He saw that a great crowd of Germans were still on the other side; he saw the struggles of that mass of men, in which every one was trying to be the first to reach the bridge and safety beyond. A terrible panic ensued. Many soldiers threw themselves into the river and tried to swim across. The mass of soldiers on the other side, still numbering several thousands, were pressed harder and harder; the telephone messages were becoming ever more urgent. All at once the acting officer jumped up, pushed aside the sapper in charge of the apparatus, and in the next second a mighty explosion was heard. Bridge and men were blown into the air for hundreds of yards. Like a river at times of inundations the Marne was carrying away wood and men, tattered uniforms and horses. Swimming across it was of no earthly use, and yet soldiers kept throwing themselves into the river.

On the other side the French began to disarm completely the German soldiers, who could be seen standing there with hands uplifted. Thousands of prisoners, innumerable horses and machine-guns had fallen into the hands of the enemy. Some of us were just going to return with the firing apparatus, which was now superfluous, when we heard the tale

of the significance of the incident, confirming the suspicions of many a one amongst us. An error had been committed that could not be undone! When the bridge higher up, that was being used to a smaller degree by the soldiers, had been crossed by the German troops and the enemy had immediately begun his pursuit, the staff of officers in command at that passage intended to let a certain number of enemies cross the bridge, i.e. a number that could not be dangerous to the German troops, who were in temporary safety. Those hasty troops of the enemy could not have received any assistance after the bridge had been blown up, and would have been annihilated or taken prisoners. For that reason it was intended to postpone the blowing up of the bridge.

However, the sergeant-major in charge of the firing apparatus imagined, as his thoughts kept whirling through his head, that the telephone wire must have been destroyed, and blew up on his own initiative the bridge that was densely crowded with Frenchmen, before our opponent succeeded in interrupting the wires. But at the same time the acting officer in charge of the firing apparatus of the second bridge received an order the words of which (as he later himself confessed) were not at all clear to him, threw aside the receiver, lost the absolutely necessary assurance, killed all

the people on the bridge, and delivered hundreds upon hundreds into the hands of the enemy.

We had no time to gather any more detailed impressions, for we received the order that all the men of our company were to gather at Vitry before the cathedral. We began to sling our hook with a sigh of relief that time a little more quickly than ordinarily, for the enemy's artillery was already beginning to sweep the country systematically. We heard from wounded men of other sections, whom we met on the way, that the French had already crossed the Marne at various places. We discussed the situation among us, and found that we were all of the same opinion. Even on Belgian territory we had suffered heavy losses; every day had demanded its victims; our ranks had become thinner and thinner; many companies had been used up entirely, and, generally speaking, all companies had suffered severely. These companies, furnished and reduced to a minimum strength, now found themselves opposed to an enemy excellently provided with all necessaries. Our opponent was continually bringing up fresh troops, and we were becoming fewer every hour. We began to see that it was impossible for us to make a stand at that place. Soldiers of the various arms confirmed again and again that things were looking just as bad with them as with us, that the losses

in men and material were truly enormous. I found myself thinking of the "God of the Germans." Had He cast them aside? I "thought" it so loudly that the others could hear me. "Well," one of them remarked, "whom God wants to punish He first strikes with blindness. Perhaps He thought of Belgium, of Donchery, of Somme-Py, of Suippes, and of so many other things, and suffered us to rush into this ruin in our blind rage."

We reached Vitry. There the general misery seemed to us to be greater than outside. There was not a single house in the whole town that was not overcrowded with wounded men. Amidst all that misery pillaging had not been forgotten. To make room for the wounded all the warehouses had been cleared and their contents thrown into the streets. The soldiers of the ambulance corps walked about, and everything that was of value and that pleased them they annexed. But the worst "hyenas" of the battle-field are to be found in the ammunition and transport trains. The men of these two branches of the army have sufficient room in their wagons to store things away. The assertion is, moreover, proved by the innumerable confiscations, by the German Imperial Post Office, of soldiers' parcels, all of them containing gold rings, chains, watches, precious stones, etc. The cases discovered in that or any other way are closely

gone into and the criminals are severely punished, but it is well known that only a small percentage of the crimes see the light of day. What are a thousand convictions or so for a hundred thousand crimes!

In Vitry the marauders' business was again flourishing. The soldiers of the transport trains, above all, are in no direct danger in war. Compared with the soldiers fighting at the Front it is easy for them to find food; besides, it is they who transport the provisions of the troops. They know that their lives are not endangered directly, and that they have every reason to suppose that they will return unscathed. To them war is a business, because they largely take possession of all that is of any value. We could therefore comprehend that they were enthusiastic patriots and said quite frankly that they hoped the war would continue for years. Later on we knew what had happened when the Emperor had made one of his "rousing" speeches somewhere in the west, and had found the "troops" in an "excellent" mood and "full of fight." Among that sort of troops there were, besides the transport soldiers, numerous cavalry distributed among the various divisions, Army Corps Staffs, and General Staffs.

XIV

THE FLIGHT FROM THE MARNE

We soon reached the cathedral and reported to Lieutenant Spahn, whom we found there. He, too, had defended his "Fatherland" in that town. Clean-shaven and faultlessly dressed, he showed up to great advantage contrasted with us. There we stood in ragged, dirty, blood-stained uniforms, our hair dishevelled, with a growing beard covered with clay and mud. We were to wait. That was all. We sat down and gazed at the misery around us. The church was filled with wounded men. Many died in the hands of the medical men. The dead were carried out to make room for others. The bodies were taken to one side where whole rows of them were lying already. We took the trouble to count the dead, who had been mostly placed in straight rows, and counted more than sixty. Some of them were in uniforms that were still quite good, whilst our uniforms were nothing but rags hanging from our backs. There were some sappers among them, but their coats were not any better than our own.

"Let us take some infantry coats," somebody ventured; "what's the difference? A coat is a coat." So we went and took the coats from several bodies and tried them on. Taking off their clothes was no easy job, for the corpses were already rigid like a piece of wood. But what was to be done? We could not run about in our shirt-sleeves! All did not find something to fit them, and the disappointed ones had to wait for another chance to turn up. We also needed boots, of course; but the corpses lying before our eyes had boots on that were not much better than our own. They had worn theirs as long as we had worn ours, but we thought we might just inspect them all the same. We looked and found a pair of fairly good ones. They were very small, but we guessed they might fit one or the other amongst us. Two of us tried to remove them. "But they are a tight fit," one of the two remarked. Two more came up to help. Two were holding the leg of the dead man while the two others tugged at the boot. It was of no use; the leg and the foot were so rigid that it was found impossible to get the boot off. "Let it go," one of those holding the leg remarked; "you will sooner pull off his leg than remove that boot." We let go just as the doctor passed. "What are you doing there?" he asked us. "We want to get some boots." "Then you will have to cut

them open; don't waste your time; the rigid leg will not release the boot." He passed on. The situation was not complete without a brutal joke. An infantryman standing near said, pointing to the dead, "Now you know it; let them keep their old boots, they don't want to walk on their bare feet." The joke was laughed at. And why not? Here we were out of danger. What were the others to us? We were still alive and those lying there could hear no longer. We saw no other things in war, and better things we had not been taught.

It is true that on the way we had got some bread by begging for it, but we were still quite hungry. Nothing was to be seen of our field-kitchen. The crew of our field-kitchen and the foraging officer and sergeant always preferred to defend their "Fatherland" several tens of miles behind the Front. What were others to them? What were we to them? As long as they did not need to go within firing range of the artillery they were content. Comradeship ceases where the field-kitchen begins.

There were, however, some field-kitchens belonging to other parts of the army. They had prepared meals, but could not get rid of the food; even if their company, i.e. the rest of their company, should have arrived they would have had far too

much food. Many a one for whom they had prepared a meal was no longer in need of one. Thus we were most willingly given as much to eat as we wanted. We had scarcely finished eating when we had to form up again. Gradually several men of our company had come together. We lined up in a manner one is used to in war. The " old man " arrived. One of the officers reported the company to him, but evidently did not report the number of the missing. Perhaps the " old man " did not care, for he did not even ask whether we knew anything about the one or the other. He stepped in front of the company and said (a sign of his good temper), " Good morning, men ! " (It was seven o'clock in the evening !) As an answer he got a grunting noise such as is sometimes made by a certain animal, and a sneering grin. Without much ado we were ordered to go to the tool wagons which were standing near the northern exit of the town, and provide ourselves with rifle ammunition and three hand-grenades each. " At half-past nine to-night you have to line up here ; each man must have 500 cartridges, three hand-grenades, and fuses for igniting them ; step aside ! "

On our way to the implement wagons we noticed that everywhere soldiers who had lost their companies were being drawn together and that new formations were being got together with the

greatest speed. We felt that something was in the air, but could not tell what it might be. The rain had started again and was coming down in torrents. When we were at the appointed place at half-past nine in the evening we saw all the principal streets filled with troops, all of them in storming outfit like ourselves. A storming outfit consists of a suit made of cloth, a cap, light marching baggage, tent canvas, cooking utensils, tent-pegs, the iron ration, and, in the case of sappers, trench tools also. During the day we had got our "Klamotten," i.e. our equipment, together again. We were standing in the rain and waited. We did not yet know what was going to happen. Then we were ordered to take off the locks of our rifles and put them in our bread-bags. The rifles could not now be used for shooting. We began to feel what was coming, viz. a night attack with bayonets and hand-grenades. So as not to shoot each other in the dark we had to remove the lock from the rifle. We stood there till about eleven o'clock, when we were suddenly ordered to camp. We did not know what the whole thing meant, and were especially puzzled by the last order, which was, however, welcomed by all of us. We judged from the rolling thunder that the battle had not yet decreased in violence, and the sky was everywhere red from the burning villages and farm-houses.

Returning "home" we gathered from the conversation the officers had among themselves that a last attempt was to be made to repel the French; that explained the preparation for the night assault, the order for which had now been cancelled. They had evidently made, or been obliged to make, another resolution at the General Staff; perhaps they had recognised that no more could be done, and had rescinded the order for the attack and decided upon a retreat, which began the next morning at six o'clock. We, however, had no idea that it would be our last night at Vitry.

We lodged in a shanty for the night. Being sufficiently tired we were soon in a deep slumber. We had to rise at four o'clock in the morning. Each of us received a loaf of bread; we filled our water-bottles, and marched off. Whither we were marching we were not told, but we guessed it. The remaining population of Vitry, too, seemed to be informed; some were lining the streets, and their glances were eloquent. Everywhere a feverish activity was to be observed. We halted outside the town. The captain called us to gather round him and addressed us as follows: "Our troops will evacuate their positions on account of the difficult terrain, and retire to those heights where they will take up new positions." In saying that he turned round and pointed to a ridge near the horizon.

He continued: "There we shall settle down and expect the enemy. New reinforcements will arrive there to-day, and some days hence you will be able to send a picture post card home from Paris." I must avow that the majority of us believed that humbug at the time. Other portions of the army were already arriving from all directions. We had been marching for some hours when we heard that Vitry had already been occupied again by the French and that all the material stored at Vitry, together with all the hospitals, doctors and men, and whole companies of the medical service, had been taken there.

Towards two o'clock in the afternoon we reached the heights the captain had shown us, but he had evidently forgotten everything, for we marched on and on. Even the most stupid amongst us now began to fear that we had been humbugged. The roads became ever more densely crowded with retreating troops and trains; from all sides they came and wanted to use the main road that was also being used by us, and the consequence was that the road became too congested and that we were continually pushed more to the rear. Munition wagons raced past us, singly, without any organisation. Order was no longer observed. Canteen and baggage wagons went past, and here already a wild confusion arose. Every moment

there was a stop and all got wedged. Many would not wait, and some wagons were driven by the side of the road, through fields turned sodden by the rain, in an attempt to get along. One wagon would be overturned, another one would stick in the mud. No great trouble was taken to recover the vehicles, the horses were taken out and the wagon was left. The drivers took the horses and tried to get along; every one was intent upon finding safety. Thus one incident followed upon another.

An officer came riding up and delivered an order to our captain. We did not know what it was. But we halted and stepped into a field. Having stacked our rifles we were allowed to lie down. We lay down by the side of the road and gazed at the columns, field-kitchens, transports, medical trains, field-post wagons, all filing past us in picturesque confusion. Wounded men were lying or sitting on all the vehicles. Their faces showed that riding on those heavy wagons caused them pain. But they, too, wanted to get along at any price, for they knew from personal experience what it meant to fall into the hands of an uncompromising enemy. They would perhaps be considered as little as they and we ourselves had formerly considered the wounded Frenchmen left in our hands. Because they knew this, as all of

us did, they did not want to be left behind for anything in the world.

We had as yet not the slightest idea what we were to do. Night came upon us, and it poured again in torrents. We lay on the ground and felt very cold. Our tired bodies no longer gave out any heat. Yet we stayed on the ground too tired to move. Sections of artillery now began to arrive, but most of the batteries had no longer their full number (six) of guns. One had lost three, another two; many guns even arrived singly. Quite a number of limbers, some fifty or so, passed without guns. Those batteries had only been able to save the horses and had been obliged to leave the guns in the hands of the French. Others had only two or four horses instead of six.

Presently some fifteen motor-cars, fine, solid cars, came along. We gazed in astonishment at the strong, elegant vehicles. "Ah!" my neighbours exclaimed, "the General Staff!" Duke Albrecht of Württemberg and his faithful retainers! We were getting rebellious again. Every one felt wild, and it rained curses. One man said: "After having sent thousands to their doom they are now making off in motor-cars." We were lying in the swamp, and nobody noticed us. The automobiles raced past and soon left all behind them. We were still quite in the dark as to our purpose in that

place. We lay there for hours, till ten o'clock at night. The troops were surging back largely in dissolved formations. Machine-gun sections arrived with empty wagons; they had lost all their guns. In the west we heard the thunder of guns coming nearer and nearer. We did not know whether we were going to be sent into battle again or not.

The confusion in the road became worse and worse and degenerated in the darkness into a panic. Refugees, who were wandering about with women and children in that dark night and in the pouring rain, got under the wheels of wagons; wounded men in flight were likewise crushed by the wheels; and cries for help came from everywhere out of the darkness. The roads were badly worn. Abandoned vehicles were lining the sides of the way. We began to move at three o'clock in the morning, and before we were fully aware of what was happening we found ourselves with the rear-guard. Regiments of infantry, shot to pieces, arrived in a pitiful condition. They had cast away their knapsacks and all unnecessary impediments, and were trying to get along as fast as possible. Soon after, the first shrapnel of the enemy began to burst above our heads, which caused us to accelerate our march continually. The road, which had also been used during the advance, was still marked by

deep shell-holes that were filled with water to the very edge, for it rained without interruption. It was pitch-dark, and every now and then somebody would fall into one of those shell-holes. We were all wet through, but continued to press on. Some would stumble over something in the dark, but nobody paid any attention. The great thing was to get along. Dead horses and men lay in the middle of the road, but nobody took the trouble to remove the " obstacle."

It was almost light when we reached a small village and halted. The whole place was at once occupied and put in a state of defence as well as was possible. We took up positions behind the walls of the cemetery. Other troops arrived incessantly, but all in disorder, in a wild, confused jumble. Cavalry and artillery also arrived together with a machine-gun section. These, however, had kept their formations intact; there was some disorder, but no sign of panic. One could see that they had suffered considerable losses though their casualties had not been as heavy as ours. The enemy was bombarding us with his guns in an increasing degree, but his fire had no effect. Some houses had been hit and set alight by shells. Far away from us hostile cavalry patrols showed themselves, but disappeared again. Everything was quiet. Ten minutes afterwards things in front of

us began to get lively; we saw whole columns of the enemy approach. Without firing a shot we turned and retired farther back. Mounted artillery were stationed behind the village and were already firing into the advancing enemy. A cavalry patrol came galloping across the open field, their horses being covered with foam. We heard the leader of the patrol, an officer, call out in passing to a cavalry officer that strong forces of the enemy were coming on by all the roads. We left the village behind us and sought to get along as quickly as possible. We had no idea where we were. The cavalry and artillery sections that had been left behind were keeping the enemy under fire. Towards noon shrapnel was again exploding above our heads, but the projectiles were bursting too high up in the air to do any damage to us. Yet it was a serious warning to us, for it gave us to understand that the enemy was keeping close on our heels—a sufficient reason to convert our retreat into a flight. We therefore tried to get away as fast as our tired-out bones would let us. We knew there was no chance of a rest to-day. So we hurried on in the drenching rain.

The number of those who dropped by the way from exhaustion became larger and larger. They belonged to various portions of the army. We could not help them, and there were no more

wagons; these were farther in front. Those unfortunate men, some of whom were unconscious, were left behind just as the exhausted horses. Those who had sufficient strength left crawled to the side of the road; but the unconscious ones remained where they fell, exposed to the hoofs of the horses and the wheels of the following last detachments. If they were lucky enough not to be crushed to atoms they fell into the hands of the enemy. Perhaps those who found our men were men and acted accordingly, but if they were soldiers brutalised by war, patriots filled with hatred, as could also be found in our own ranks, then the "Boche" (as the French say) had to die a miserable death by the road, die for his "Fatherland." To our shame be it said, we knew it from our own experience, and summoned all our energy so as not to be left behind. I was thinking of the soldier of the Foreign Legion lying in the desert sand, left behind by his troop and awaiting the hungry hyenas.

The road was covered with the equipment the soldiers had thrown away. We, too, had long ago cast aside all unnecessary ballast. Thus we were marching, when we passed a wood densely packed with refugees. Those hunted people had stretched blankets between the trees so as to protect themselves from the rain. There they were lying in the

greatest conceivable misery, all in a jumble, women and men, children and greybeards. Their camp reached as far as the road, and one could observe that the terrible hours they had lived through had left deep furrows in their faces. They looked at us with weary, tired eyes. The children begged us to give them some bread, but we had nothing whatsoever left and were ourselves tormented by hunger. The enemy's shrapnel was still accompanying us, and we had scarcely left the wood when shrapnel began to explode there, which caused the refugees, now exposed to the fire, to crowd into the fields in an attempt to reach safety. Many of them joined us, but before long they were forbidden to use the road because they impeded the retreat of the troops. Thus all of them were driven without pity into the fields soaked by the rain.

When we came to a pillaged village towards the evening we were at last granted a short rest, for in consequence of our quick marching we had disengaged ourselves almost completely from the enemy. We heard the noise of the rear-guard actions at a considerable distance behind us, and we wished that they would last a long time, for then we could rest for a longer period. From that village the head man and two citizens were carried off by the Germans, the three being escorted by cavalry. We were not told why those people were

being taken along, but each place had to furnish such "hostages," whole troops of whom were being marched off. The remaining cattle had also been taken; troopers were driving the animals along in large droves. We were part of the rear-guard. It is therefore easy to understand why we found no more eatables. Hunger began to plague us more and more. Not a mouthful was to be had in the village we had reached, and without having had any food we moved on again after half-an-hour's rest.

We had marched two miles or so when we came upon a former camping place. Advancing German troops had camped there about a week ago. The bread that had evidently been plentiful at that time now lay scattered in the field. Though the bread had been lying in the open for about a week and had been exposed to a rain lasting for days, we picked it up and swallowed it ravenously. As long as those pangs of hunger could be silenced, it mattered little what it was that one crammed into one's stomach.

XV

AT THE END OF THE FLIGHT

Night fell again, and there was still no prospect of sleep and recuperation. We had no idea of how far we had to retire. Altogether we knew very little of how things were going. We saw by the strange surroundings that we were not using the same road on which we had marched before to the Marne as "victors." "Before!" It seemed to us as if there was an eternity between that "before" and the present time, for many a one who was with us then was now no longer among us.

One kept thinking and thinking, one hour chased the other. Involuntarily one was drawn along. We slept whilst walking. Our boots were literally filled with water. Complaining was of no use. We had to keep on marching. Another night passed. Next morning troops belonging to the main army were distributed among the rear-guard. In long columns they were lying by the side of the road to let us pass in order to join up behind. We breathed a sigh of relief, for now we were no

longer exposed to the enemy's artillery-fire. After a march of some five hours we halted, and were lucky enough to find ourselves close to a company of infantry that had happily saved its field-kitchen.

After the infantrymen had eaten we were given the remains, about a pint of bean soup each. Some sappers of our company were still among that section of the infantry. They had not been able to find us and had joined the infantry. We thought they were dead or had been taken prisoners, but they had only been scattered and had lost their way. We had hopes to recover still many a one of our missing comrades in a similar manner, but we found only a few more afterwards. In the evening of the same day we saw another fellow of our company sitting on the limber of the artillery. When he saw us he joined us immediately and told us what had happened to him. The section he belonged to had its retreat across the Marne cut off; nearly all had been made prisoners and the French were about to disarm them when he fled and was lucky enough to reach the other side of the Marne by swimming across the river. He, too, could not or did not want to find our company, and joined the artillery so as not to be forced to walk, so he explained. Our opinion was that he would have done better by remaining a prisoner, for in that case the murdering business would have ended as

far as he was concerned. We told him so, and he agreed with us. "However," he observed, "is it sure that the French would have spared us? I know how we ourselves acted; and if they had cut us down remorselessly we should now be dead. Who could have known it?" I knew him too well not to be aware that he for one had every reason to expect from the enemy what he had often done in his moments of bloodthirst; when he was the "victor" he knew neither humanity nor pity.

It was not yet quite dark when we reached a large village. We were to find quarters there and rest as long as was possible. But we knew well enough that we should be able to rest only for as long as the rear-guard could keep the enemy back. Our quarters were in the public school, and on account of the lack of food we were allowed to consume our iron rations. Of course we had long ago lost or eaten that can of meat and the little bag of biscuits. We therefore lay down with rumbling stomachs.

At eleven o'clock in the night the alarm was sounded. In the greatest hurry we had to get ready to march off, and started at once. The night was pitch-dark, and it was still raining steadily. The officers kept on urging us to hurry up, and the firing of rifles told us that the enemy was again close at our heels. At daybreak we

passed the town of Ste. Menehould, which was completely intact. Here we turned to the east, still stubbornly pursued by the French, and reached Clermont-en-Argonne at noon. Again we got some hours of rest, but in the evening we had to move on again all night long in a veritable forced march. We felt more tired from hour to hour, but there was no stopping.

The rain had stopped when we left the road at ten o'clock in the morning and we were ordered to occupy positions. We breathed again freely, for that exhausting retreat lasting for days had reduced us to a condition that was no longer bearable. So we began to dig ourselves in. We had not half finished digging our trenches when a hail of artillery projectiles was poured on us. Fortunately we lost but few men, but it was impossible to remain any longer, and we were immediately ordered to retreat. We marched on over country roads, and it was dark when we began to dig in again. We were in the neighbourhood of Challerange, quite near the village of Cernay-en-Dormois. It was very dark and a thick mist surrounded us. We soldiers had no knowledge of the whereabouts of the enemy. As quickly as possible we tried to deepen our trench, avoiding every unnecessary noise. Now and then we heard secret patrols of the enemy approach, only to disappear again immediately.

It was there we got our first reinforcements. They came up in the dark in long rows, all of them fresh troops and mostly men of the Landwehr, large numbers of whom were still in blue uniforms. By their uniforms and equipment one could see that the men had been equipped and sent off in great haste. They had not yet heard the whistle of a bullet, and were anxiously inquiring whether the place was dangerous. They brought up numerous machine-guns, and in a jiffy we had prepared everything for the defence.

We could not get to know where the French were supposed to be. The officers only told us to keep in our places. Our trench was thickly crowded with men, and provided with numerous machine-guns. We instructed the new arrivals in the way they would have to behave if an attack should be made, and told them to keep quite still and cool during the attack and aim accurately.

They were mostly married men who had been dragged from their occupations, and had been landed right in our midst without understanding clearly what was happening to them. They had no idea in what part of the country they were, and they overwhelmed us with all sorts of questions. They were not acquainted with the handling of the new 98 rifle. They were provided with a remodelled rifle of the 88 pattern, for which

our ammunition could be used. Though no shots were fired the "new ones" anxiously avoided putting their heads above the edge of the trench. They provided us liberally with eatables and cigars.

It was getting light, and as yet we had not seen much of the enemy. Slowly the mist began to disappear, and now we observed the French occupying positions some hundred yards in front of us. They had made themselves new positions during the night exactly as we had done. Immediately firing became lively on both sides. Our opponent left his trench and attempted an attack, but our great mass of machine-guns literally mowed down his ranks. An infernal firing had set in, and the attack was beaten off after only a few steps had been made by the opposing troops. The French renewed their attack again and again, and when at noon we had beaten back eight assaults of that kind hundreds upon hundreds of dead Frenchmen were covering the ground between our trenches and theirs. The enemy had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to break down our iron wall and stopped his attacks.

At that time we had no idea that this was to be the beginning of a murderous exhausting war of position, the beginning of a slow, systematic, and useless slaughter. For months and months we

were to fight on in the same trench, without gaining or losing ground, sent forward again and again to murder like raving beasts and driven back again. Perhaps it was well that we did not know at that time that hundreds of thousands of men were to lose their lives in that senseless slaughter.

The wounded men between the trenches had to perish miserably. Nobody dared help them as the opposing side kept up their fire. They perished slowly, quite slowly. Their cries died away after long hours, one after the other. One man after the other had lain down to sleep, never to wake again. Some we could hear for days; night and day they begged and implored one to assist them, but nobody could help. Their cries became softer and softer until at last they died away—all suffering had ceased. There was no possibility of burying the dead. They remained where they fell for weeks. The bodies began to decompose and spread pestilential stenches, but nobody dared to come and bury the dead. If a Frenchman showed himself to look for a friend or a brother among the dead he was fired at from all directions. His life was dearer to him and he never tried again. We had exactly the same experience. The French tried the Red Cross flag. We laughed and shot it to pieces. The impulse to shoot down the "enemy" suppressed every feeling of humanity, and the

" Red Cross " had lost its significance when raised by a Frenchman. Suspicion was nourished artificially, so that we thought the " enemy " was only abusing the flag ; and that was why we wanted to shoot him and the flag to bits.

But we ourselves took the French for barbarians because they paid us back in kind and prevented us from removing our own wounded men to safety. The dead remained where they were, and when ten weeks later we were sent to another part of the Front they were still there.

We had been fortunate in beating back all attacks and had inflicted enormous losses upon the enemy without having ourselves lost many dead or wounded men. Under those circumstances no further attack was to be expected for the time being. So we employed all our strength to fortify our position as strongly as possible. Half of the men remained in their places, and the other half made the trenches wider and deeper. But both sides maintained a continuous lively fire. The losses we suffered that day were not especially large, but most of the men who were hit were struck in the head, for the rest of the body was protected by the trench.

When darkness began to descend the firing increased in violence. Though we could not see anything we fired away blindly because we thought

the enemy would not attempt an attack in that case. We had no target and fired always in the direction of the enemy's trench. Throughout the night ammunition and materials were brought up, and new troops kept arriving. Sand-bags were brought in great quantities, filled and utilized as cover, as a protection from the bullets. The sappers were relieved towards morning. We had to assemble at a farm behind the firing-line. The farm-house had been completely preserved, and all the animals were still there; but that splendour was destined to disappear soon. Gradually several hundreds of soldiers collected there, and then began a wild chase after ducks, geese, pigeons, etc. The feathered tribe, numbering more than 500 head, had been captured in a few hours, and everywhere cooking operations were in full swing.

There were more than eighty cows and bullocks in a neighbouring field. All of them were shot by the soldiers and worked into food by the field-kitchens. In that place everything was taken. Stores of hay and grain had been dragged away in a few hours. Even the straw-sheds and out-buildings were broken up, the wood being used as fuel. In a few hours that splendid farm had become a wreck, and its proprietor had been reduced to beggary. I had seen the owner that morning; but he had suddenly disappeared with

his wife and children, and nobody knew whither. The farm was within reach of the artillery-fire, and the farmer sought safety somewhere else. Not a soul cared where he had gone.

Rifle-bullets, aimed too high, were continually flying about us, but nobody cared in the least, though several soldiers had been hit. A man of our company, named Mertens, was sitting on the ground cleaning his rifle when he was shot through the neck ; he died a few minutes after. We buried him in the garden of the farm, placed his helmet on his grave, and forgot all about him.

Near the farm a German howitzer battery was in position. The battery was heavily shelled by the enemy. Just then a munition train consisting of three wagons came up to carry ammunition to the battery. We had amongst us a sergeant called Luwie, from Frankfort-on-the-Main. One of his brothers, also a sergeant, was in the column that was passing by. That had aroused our interest, and we watched the column to see whether it would succeed in reaching the battery through the fire the enemy was keeping up. Everything seemed to go along all right when suddenly the sergeant, the brother of the sapper sergeant, was hit by a shell and torn to pieces, together with his horse. His own brother was watching all this. It was hard to tell what was passing through his mind.

He was seen to quiver. That was all; then he stood motionless. Presently he went straight to the place of the catastrophe without heeding the shells that were striking everywhere, fetched the body of his brother and laid it down. Part of the left foot of the dead man was missing and nearly the whole right leg; a piece of shell as big as a fist stuck in his chest. He laid down his brother and hurried back to recover the missing limbs. He brought back the leg, but could not find the foot that had been torn off. When we had buried the mangled corpse the sergeant borrowed a map of the General Staff from an officer and marked the exact spot of the grave so as to find it again after the war.

The farm-house had meanwhile been turned into a bandaging station. Our losses increased very greatly judging from the wounded men, who arrived in large numbers. The farm-house offered a good target to the enemy's artillery; though it was hidden by a hillock some very high poplars towered above that elevation. We felled those trees. Towards evening we had to go back to the trench, for the French were renewing their attacks, but without any effect. The fresh troops were all very excited, and it was hard for them to get accustomed to the continued rolling rifle-fire. Many of them had scarcely taken up their place when they were

killed. Their blue uniforms offered a good target when they approached our positions from behind.

At night it was fairly quiet, and we conversed with the new arrivals. Some of them had had the chance of remaining in garrison service, but had volunteered for the Front. Though they had had only one day in the firing-line they declared quite frankly that they repented of their decision. They had had quite a different idea of what war was like, and believed it an adventure, had believed in the fine French wine, had dreamt of some splendid castle where one was quartered for weeks; they had thought that one would get as much to eat and drink as one wished. It was war, and in war one simply took what one wanted.

Such nonsense and similar stuff they had heard of veterans of the war of 1870–71, and they had believed that they went forward to a life of adventure and ease. Bitterly disappointed they were now sitting in the rain in a dirty trench, with a vast army of corpses before them. And every minute they were in danger of losing their life! That was a war quite different from the one they had pictured to themselves. They knew nothing of our retreat and were therefore not a little surprised when we related to them the events of the last few days.

XVI

THE BEGINNING OF TRENCH WARFARE

On the next morning, at daybreak, we quitted the trench again in order to rest for two days. We went across the fields and took up quarters at Cernay-en-Dormois. We lodged in one of the abandoned houses in the centre of the village. Our field-kitchen had not yet arrived, so we were obliged to find our own food. Members of the feathered tribe were no longer to be discovered, but if by any chance a chicken showed its head it was immediately chased by a score of men. No meat being found we resolved to be vegetarians for the time being, and roamed through the gardens in search of potatoes and vegetables. On that expedition we discovered an officer's horse tied to a fence. We knew by experience that the saddle-bags of officers' horses always concealed something that could be eaten. We were hungry enough, and quickly resolved to lead the horse away. We searched him thoroughly "under cover," and found in the saddle-bags quite a larder of fine food-stuffs,

butter and lard among them. Then we turned the horse loose and used the captured treasure to prepare a meal, the like of which we had not tasted for a long time.

It tasted fine in spite of our guilty conscience. One man made the fire, another peeled the potatoes, etc. Pots and a stove we found in the kitchen of one of the houses in the neighbourhood.

Towards evening long trains with provisions and endless rows of fresh troops arrived. In long columns they marched to the Front and relieved the exhausted men. Soon the whole place was crowded with soldiers. After a two days' rest we had to take up again the regular night duties of the sapper. Every night we had to visit the position to construct wire entanglements. The noise caused by the ramming in of the posts mostly drew the attention of the French upon us, and thus we suffered losses almost every night. But our rest during the daytime was soon to be put an end to, for the enemy's artillery began to shell the place regularly. Curiously enough, the shelling took place always at definite hours. Thus, at the beginning, every noon from 12 to 2 o'clock from fifty to eighty shells used to fall in the place. At times the missiles were shrapnel from the field-artillery. One got accustomed to it, though soldiers of other arms were killed or wounded daily. Once we were lying at

noon in our lodgings when a shrapnel-shell exploded in our room, happily without doing any damage. The whole room was filled with dust and smoke, but not one troubled to leave his place. That sort of shooting was repeated almost daily with increasing violence. The remaining inhabitants of the village, mostly old people, were all lodged in a barn for fear of espionage. There they were guarded by soldiers. As the village was being bombarded always at certain hours the officer in command of the place believed that somebody in the village communicated with the enemy with a hidden telephone. They even went so far as to remove the hands of the church clock, because somebody had seen quite distinctly "that the hands of the clock (which was not going) had moved and were pointing to six and immediately afterwards to five." Of course the spy that had signalled to the enemy by means of the church clock could be discovered as little as the man with the concealed telephone. But in order to be quite sure to catch the "real" culprit all the civilians were interned in the barn. Those civilian prisoners were provided with food and drink like the soldiers, and like the soldiers they were also exposed to the daily bombardment, which gradually devastated the whole village. Two women and a child had already been killed in consequence, and yet the

people were not removed. Almost daily a house burned down at some spot or other in the village, and the shells now began falling at eight o'clock in the evening. The shells were of a large size. We knew exactly that the first shell would arrive punctually at eight o'clock, and we left the place every night. The whole village became empty, and exactly at eight o'clock the first shell came buzzing heavily over to our side. At short intervals, fourteen or sixteen at the most, but never more, followed it. Those sixteen we nicknamed the "iron portion." Our opinion was that the gun was sent forward by the French when it became dark, that it fired a few shots, and was then taken to the rear again. When we returned from our "walk," as we called that nightly excursion, we had to go to our positions. There we had to perform all imaginable kinds of work. One evening we had to fortify a small farm we had taken from the French the day before. We were to construct machine-gun emplacements. The moon was shining fairly brightly. In an adjoining garden there were some fruit-trees, an apple-tree among them, with some apples still attached to it. A Frenchman had hanged himself on that tree. Though the body must have hung for some days—for it smelled considerably—some of our sappers were eager to get the apples. The soldiers took the apples

without troubling in the least about the dead man.

Near that farm we used mine-throwers for the first time. The instruments we used there were of a very primitive kind. They consisted of a pipe made of strong steel plate and resting on an iron stand. An unexploded shell was filled with dynamite, provided with a fuse and cap, and placed in the tube of the mine-thrower. Behind it was placed a driving charge of black powder of a size corresponding with the distance of the target and the weight of the projectile. The driving charge, too, was provided with a fuse that was of such a length that the explosion was only produced after the man lighting the fuse had had time to return to a place of safety. The fuse of the mine was lit at the same time as the former, but was of a length commensurate with the time of flight of the mine, so as to explode the latter when the mine struck the target, or after a calculated period should the mark be missed. The driving charge must be of such strength that it throws the projectile no farther than is intended. The mine-thrower is not fired horizontally but at a steep angle. The tube from which the mine is fired is, for instance, placed at an angle of 45 degrees, and receives a charge of 15 grammes of black powder when the distance is 400 yards.

If it happens that the driving charge does not explode, and the projectile remains in the tube, the fuse of the mine continues burning, and the mine explodes in the tube and demolishes the stand and everything in its neighbourhood. When we used these mine-throwers here for the first time an accident of the kind described happened. Two volunteers and a sapper who were in charge of the mine-thrower in question thought the explosion took too long a time. They believed it was a miss. When they had approached to a distance of some five paces the mine exploded and all three of them were wounded very severely. We had too little experience in the management of mine-throwers. They had been forgotten, had long ago been thrown on the rubbish-heap, giving way to more modern technical appliances of war. Thus, when they suddenly cropped up again during the war of position, we had to learn their management from the beginning. The officers, who understood these implements still less than we ourselves did, could not give us any hints, so it was no wonder that accidents like the foregoing happened frequently.

These mine-throwers cannot be employed for long distances ; at 600 yards they reach the utmost limit of their effectiveness.

Besides handling the mine-throwers we had to furnish secret patrols every night. The chief

purpose of those excursions was the destruction of the enemy's defences or to harry the enemy's sentries so as to deprive them of sleep.

We carried hand-grenades for attack and defence. When starting on such an excursion we were always specially instructed to find out the number of the army section that an opponent we might kill belonged to. The French generally have their regimental number on the collar of their coat or on their cap. So whenever we "spiflicated" one and succeeded in getting near him we would cut the number out of his coat with a knife or take away his coat or cap. In that way the German army command identified the opposing army corps. They thus got to know exactly the force our opponent was employing and whether his best troops were in front of us. All of us greatly feared those night patrols, for the hundreds of men killed months ago were still lying between the lines. Those corpses were decomposed to a pulp. So when a man went on nocturnal patrol duty, and when he had to crawl in the utter darkness on hands and knees over all those bodies he would now and then land in the decomposed faces of the dead. If then a man happened to have a tiny wound in his hands his life was greatly endangered by the septic virus. As a matter of fact three sappers and two infantrymen of the Landwehr Regiment No. 17 died

in consequence of poisoning by septic virus. Later on that kind of patrolling was given up or only resorted to in urgent cases, and only such men were employed who were free of wounds. That led to nearly all of us inflicting skin wounds on ourselves to escape patrol duty.

Our camping place, Cernay-en-Dormois, was still being bombarded violently by the enemy every day. The firing became so heavy at last that we could no longer sleep during the day. The large shells penetrated the houses and reached the cellars. The civilian prisoners were sent away after some had been killed by shells. We ourselves, however, remained in the place very much against our inclination in spite of the continuous bombardment. Part of our company lived in a large farm-house, where recently arrived reserves were also lodged. One day, at noon, the village was suddenly overwhelmed by a hail of shells of a large size. Five of them struck the farm-house mentioned, almost at the same time. All the men were resting in the spacious rooms. The whole building was demolished, and our loss consisted of seventeen dead and twenty-eight wounded men. The field-kitchen in the yard was also completely destroyed. Without waiting for orders we all cleared out of the village and collected again outside. But the captain ordered us to return to the place because, so he

said, he had not yet received orders from the divisional commander to evacuate the village. Thereupon we went back to our old quarters and embarked again on a miserable existence. After living in the trenches during the night, in continual danger of life, we arrived in the morning, after those hours of trial, with shattered nerves, at our lodgings. We could not hope to get any rest and sleep, for the shells kept falling everywhere in the village. In time, however, one becomes accustomed to everything. When a shell came shrieking along we knew exactly whereabout it would strike. By the sound it made we knew whether it was of large or small size and whether the shell, having come down, would burst or not. Similarly the soldiers formed a reliable judgment in regard to the nationality of an aeroplane. When an aeroplane was seen at a great distance near the horizon the soldiers could mostly say exactly whether it was a German or a French flying machine. It is hard to say by what we recognised the machines. One seems to feel whether it is a friend or a foe that is coming. Of course a soldier also remembers the characteristic noise of the motor and the construction of the aeroplane.

When a French flier passed over our camp the streets would quickly empty themselves. The reason was not that we were afraid of the flying-

man; we disappeared because we knew that a bombardment would follow after he had landed and reported. We left the streets so as to convey the impression that the place was denuded of troops. But the trick was not of much use. Every day houses were set alight, and the church, which had been furnished as a hospital, was also struck several times.

Up to that time it had been comparatively quiet at the Front. We had protected our position with wide wire entanglements. Quite a maze of trenches, a thing that defies description, had been constructed. One must have seen it in order to comprehend what immense masses of soil had been dug up.

Our principal position consisted of from six to eight trenches, one behind the other, and each provided with strong parapets and barbed-wire entanglements; each trench had been separately fortified. The distance between the various trenches was sometimes twenty yards, sometimes a hundred and more, all according to the requirements of the terrain. All those positions were joined by lines of approach. Those connecting roads are not wide, are only used by the relieving troops and for transporting purposes, and are constructed in a way that prevents the enemy from enfilading them; they run in a zigzag course. To the rear of the

communication trenches are the shelters of the resting troops (reserves). Two companies of infantry, for instance, will have to defend in the first trench a section of the front measuring some two hundred yards. One company is always on duty, whilst the other is resting in the rear. However, the company at rest must ever be ready for the firing-line and is likely to be aroused at any minute for service at a moment's notice should the enemy attack. The company is in telephonic communication with the one doing trench duty. Wherever the country (as on swampy ground) does not permit the construction of several trenches and the housing of the reserves, the latter are stationed far in the rear, often in the nearest village. In such places, relieving operations, though carried out only at night, are very difficult and almost always accompanied by casualties. Relief is not brought up at fixed hours, for the enemy must be deceived. But the enemy will be informed of local conditions by his fliers, patrols, or the statements of prisoners, and will keep the country under a continual heavy curtain-fire, so that the relieving troops coming up across the open field almost always suffer losses. Food and ammunition are also forwarded at night. The following incident will illustrate the difficulty even one man by himself experiences in approaching such positions.

Myself, a sergeant, and three others had been ordered on secret patrol duty one night. Towards ten o'clock we came upon the line of the curtain-fire. We were lying flat on the ground, waiting for a favourable opportunity to cross. However, one shell after the other exploded in front of us, and it would have been madness to attempt to pass at that point. Next to me lay a sapper of my own annual military class ; nothing could be seen of the sergeant and the two other privates. On a slight elevation in front of us we saw in the moonlight the shadowy forms of some persons who were lying flat on the ground like ourselves. We thought it impossible to pass here. My mate, pointing to the shapes before us, said, " There's Sergeant Mertens and the others ; I think I'll go up to them and tell him that we had better wait a while until it gets more quiet." " Yes ; do so," I replied. He crawled to the place on his hands and knees, and I observed him lying near the others. He returned immediately. The shapes turned out to be four dead Frenchmen of the colonial army, who had been there for weeks. He had only seen who they were when he received no answer to his call. The dead thus lay scattered over the whole country. Nothing could be seen of the sergeant and the other men. So we seized a favourable opportunity to slip through, surrounded by exploding shells.

We could find out nothing about our companions. Our search in the trench was likewise unsuccessful; nobody could give us the slightest information though sappers were well known among the infantry, because we had to work at all the points of the Front. An hour later the relieving infantry arrived. They had lost five men in breaking through the barrier fire. Our sergeant was among the wounded they brought in. Not a trace was ever found of the two other soldiers. Nobody knew what had become of them.

Under such and similar conditions we spent every night outside. We also suffered losses in our camp almost every day. Though reserves from our garrison town had arrived twice already, our company had a fighting strength of only seventy-five men. But at last we cleared out of the village, and were stationed at the village of Bouconville, about a mile and a half to the north-east of Cernay-en-Dormois. Cernay-en-Dormois was gradually shelled to pieces, and when at night we had to go to the trench we described a wide circle around that formerly flourishing village.

At Bouconville we received the first letters from home by the field-post. They had been on their journey for a long, long time, and arrived irregularly and in sheaves. But many were returned, marked "Addressee killed," "Addressee missing,"

"Wounded." However, many had to be marked "Addressee no longer with the army detachment." They could not quite make out the disappearance of many "addressees," but many of us had just suspicions about them, and we wished good luck to those "missing men" in crossing some neutral frontier.

The letters we received were dated the first days of August, had wandered everywhere, bore the stamps of various field post-offices, and, in contrast with the ones we received later on, were still full of enthusiasm. Mothers were not yet begging their sons not to risk their lives in order to gain the iron cross; that imploring prayer would arrive later on again and again. It was also at that place that we received the first of those small field-post parcels containing cigars and chocolate.

After staying some ten weeks in that part of the country we were directed to another part of the Front. Nobody knew, however, whither we were going to be sent. It was all the same to us. The chance of getting out of the firing-line for a few days had such a charm for us that our destination did not concern us in the least. It gave us a wonderful feeling of relief when we left the firing-zone on our march to the railway station at Challerange. For the first time in a long period we found ourselves in a state of existence where our lives

were not immediately endangered ; even the most far-reaching guns could no longer harm us. A man must have lived through such moments in order to appreciate justly the importance of such a feeling. However much one has got accustomed to being in constant danger of one's life, that danger never ceases to oppress one, to weigh one down.

At the station we got into a train made up of second- and third-class coaches. The train moved slowly through the beautiful autumnal landscape, and for the first time we got an insight into the life behind the Front. All the depots, the railway crossings and bridges were held by the military. There all the men of the Landsturm were apparently leading quite an easy life, and had made themselves comfortable in the depots and shanties of the road-men. They all looked well nourished and were well clad. Whenever the train stopped those older men treated us liberally to coffee, bread, and fruit. They could see by our looks that we had not had the same good time that they were having. They asked us whence we came. Behind the Front things were very lively everywhere. At all the larger places we could see long railway trains laden with agricultural machinery of every description. The crew of our train were men of the Prusso-Hessian State railways. They had come through those parts many times before, and told us that

the agricultural machines were being removed from the whole of the occupied territory and sent to East Prussia in order to replace what the Russians had destroyed there. The same was being done with all industrial machinery that could be spared. Again and again one could observe the finest machines on their way to Germany.

Towards midnight we passed Sedan. There we were fed by the Red Cross. The Red Cross had erected feeding stations for passing troops in long wooden sheds. Early next morning we found ourselves at Montmédy. There we had to leave the train, and were allowed to visit the town for a few hours.

XVII

FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THE ENEMY

There was no lack of food at Montmédy. The canteens were provided with everything; prices were high, however. Montmédy is a third-class French fortress and is situated like Ehrenbreitstein on a height which is very steep on one side; the town is situated at the foot of the hill. The fortress was taken by the Germans without a struggle. The garrison, who had prepared for defence before the fortress, had their retreat cut off. A railway tunnel passes through the hill under the fortress, but that had been blown up by the French. The Germans laid the rails round the hill through the town so as to establish railway communication with their Front. It looked almost comical to watch the transport trains come rolling on through the main street and across the market-place. Everywhere along the Meuse the destroyed bridges had been replaced by wooden ones. Montmédy was the chief base of the Fifth Army (that of the Crown

Prince), and contained immense stores of war material. Besides that it harboured the field post-office, the headquarters for army provisions, a railway management, and a great number of hospitals. The largest of them used to be called the "theatre hospital," on account of its being installed in the municipal theatre and the adjoining houses, and always contained from 500 to 600 wounded.

Things were very lively at Montmédy. One chiefly observed convalescent soldiers walking through the streets and a remarkable number of officers, all of whom had been attached to the various departments. They loitered about in their faultless uniforms, or rode along whip in hand. Moreover, they had not yet the slightest idea of what war was like, and when we met them they expected us to salute them in the prescribed manner. Many of them accosted us and asked us rudely why we did not salute. After a few hours we got sick of life twenty miles behind the Verdun Front.

At Montmédy we were about twenty miles behind Verdun and some sixty miles away from our former position. When towards one o'clock p.m. we began to move on we guessed that we were to be dragged to the country round Verdun. After a march of nine miles we reached the village of Jametz. There we were lodged in various barns. Nearly all

of the inhabitants had stayed on ; they seemed to be on quite friendly terms with the soldiers. Time had brought them closer to each other, and we, too, got an entirely different idea of our "hereditary enemy" on closer acquaintance. When walking through the place we were offered all kinds of things by the inhabitants, were treated to coffee, meat, and milk, exactly as is done by German patriots during manœuvres, and we were even treated better than at home. To reward them for these marks of attention we murdered the sons of those people, who desired nothing better than to live in peace.

Early next morning we moved on, and when we arrived at Damvillers in the evening we heard that we were some three miles behind the firing-line. That very night we marched to the small village of Wavrille. That was our destination, and there we took up our quarters in a house that had been abandoned by its inhabitants. We were attached to the Ninth Reserve Division, and the following day we had to take up our positions.

Fifteen of us were attached to a company of infantry. No rifle-firing was to be heard along the line, only the artillery of the two sides maintained a weak fire. We were not accustomed to such quietness in the trenches, but the men who had been here for a long time told us that sometimes

not a shot was fired for days and that there was not the slightest activity on either side. It seemed to us that we were going to have a nice quiet time.

After staying in that part of the country some four weeks we were again ordered to some other part of the Front. As usual we had no idea of our new destination. Various rumours were in circulation. Some thought it would be Flanders, others thought it would be Russia; but none guessed right.

We marched off and reached Dun-sur-Meuse in the afternoon. We had scarcely got to the town when the German Crown Prince, accompanied by some officers and a great number of hounds, rode past us. "Good day, sappers!" he called to us, looking at us closely. He spoke to our captain, and an officer of his Staff took us to an establishment of the Red Cross, where we received good food and wine. The headquarters of the Hohenzollern scion was here at Dun-sur-Meuse. The ladies of the Red Cross treated us very well. We asked them whether all the troops passing through the place were cared for as well as that. "Oh, yes," a young lady replied; "only few pass through here, but the Crown Prince has a special liking for sappers."

We lodged there for the night, and the soldiers told us that Dun-sur-Meuse was the headquarters

of the Fifth Army, that life was often very jolly there, and every day there was an open-air concert. We heard that the officers often received ladies from Germany, but, of course, the ladies only came to distribute gifts among the soldiers.

Richly provided with food we continued our march the next morning, and kept along the side of the Meuse. In the evening we were lodged at Stenay.

XVIII

FIGHTING IN THE ARGONNE

Finally, after two days, we landed at Apremont-en-Argonne. For the time being we were quartered in a large farm to the north-east of Apremont. We found ourselves quite close to the Argonne. All the soldiers whom we met and who had been there for some time told us of uninterrupted daily fighting in the woods.

Our first task was to construct underground shelters that should serve as living-rooms. We commenced work at about a mile and three-quarters behind the Front, but had to move on again after some shells had destroyed our work. We then constructed, about a mile and a quarter behind the Front, a camp consisting of thirty-five underground shelters.

A hole is dug, some five yards square and two yards deep. Short tree trunks are laid across it, and about two yards of earth piled upon them. We had no straw, so we had to sleep on the bare ground for a while. Rifle-bullets coming from the

direction of the Front kept flying above our heads and struck the trees. We were attached to the various companies of infantry; I myself was with the tenth company of the 67th Infantry Regiment.

The soil had been completely ploughed up by continued use, and the paths and roads had been covered with sticks and tree trunks so that they could be used by men and wagons. After an arduous march we reached the foremost position. It was no easy task to find one's way in that maze of trenches. The water was more than a foot deep, but at last we arrived at the most advanced position and reported to the captain of the 10th Company of the 67th Regiment of Infantry. Of course the conditions obtaining there were quite unknown to us, but the men of the infantry soon explained things to us as far as they could. After two or three days we were already quite familiar with our surroundings, and our many-sided duty began.

The French lay only some ten yards away from us. The second day we were engaged in a fight with hand-grenades. In that fight Sapper Beschtel from Saarbrücken was killed. He was our first casualty in the Argonne, but many were to follow him in the time that followed. In the rear trenches we had established an engineering depot. There

twenty-five men made nothing but hand-grenades. Thus we soon made ourselves at home, and were ready for all emergencies.

At the camp we were divided in various sections. That division in various sections gave us an idea of the endless ways and means employed in our new position. There were mining, sapping, hand-grenade sections, sections for mine-throwing and illuminating pistols. Others again constructed wire entanglements, *chevaux de frise*, or projectiles for the primitive mine-throwers. At one time one worked in one section then again in another. The forest country was very difficult. The thick, tangled underwood formed an almost insuperable obstacle. All the trees were shot down up to the firing level. Cut off clean by the machine-guns they lay in all directions on the ground, forming a natural barricade.

The infantrymen had told us about the difficulties under which fighting was carried on uninterruptedly. Not a day passed without casualties. Firing went on without a pause. The men had never experienced an interval in the firing. We were soon to get an idea of that mass-murder, that systematic slaughter. The largest part of our company was turned into a mine-laying section, and we began to mine our most advanced trench. For a distance of some 500 yards, a yard apart,

we dug in boxes of dynamite, each weighing 50 lb. Each of those mines was provided with a fuse and all were connected so that all the mines could be exploded at the same instant. The mines were then covered with soil and the connecting wires taken some hundred yards to the rear.

At that time the French were making attacks every few days. We were told to abandon the foremost trench should an attack be made. The mines had been laid two days when the expected attack occurred, and without offering any great resistance we retreated to the second trench. The French occupied the captured trench without knowing that several thousands of pounds of explosives lay buried under their feet. So as to cause our opponents to bring as many troops as possible into the occupied trench we pretended to make counter-attacks. As a matter of fact the trench was soon closely manned by French soldiers, who tried to retain it.

But that very moment our mines were exploded. There was a mighty bang, and several hundreds of Frenchmen were literally torn to pieces and blown up into the air. It all happened in a moment. Parts of human bodies spread over a large stretch of ground, and the arms, legs, and rags of uniforms hanging in the trees were the only signs of a well-planned mass-murder. In view of that catastrophe

all we had experienced before seemed to us to be child's play. That " heroic deed " was celebrated by a lusty hurrah.

For some days one had gained a little advantage, only soon to lose it again. In order to make advances the most diverse methods were used, as was said before. The mining section would cut a subterranean passage up to the enemy's position. The passage would branch out to the right and left a yard or so before the position of our opponent, and run parallel with it. The work of course takes weeks to accomplish, for the whole of the loosened soil must be taken to the rear on small mining wagons. Naturally, the soil taken out must not be heaped in one place, for if that were done the enemy would get wind of our intentions and would spoil everything by countermining. As soon as work is advanced far enough the whole passage running parallel with the enemy's trench is provided with explosives and dammed up. When the mine is exploded the whole of the enemy's trench is covered by the soil that is thrown up, burying many soldiers alive. Usually such an explosion is followed by an assault. The sapping section, on the other hand, have to dig open trenches running towards the enemy's position. These are connected by transverse trenches, the purpose being to get one's own position always closer to the

enemy's. As soon as one's position has approached near enough to make it possible to throw hand-grenades into the enemy's position the hand-grenade sections have to take up their places and bombard the enemy's trenches continually, day and night.

Some few hundred yards to the rear are the heavy modern mine-throwers firing a projectile weighing 140 lb. Those projectiles, which look like sugar-loaves, fly cumbrously over to the enemy, where they do great damage. The trade of war must not stop at night; so the darkness is made bright by means of illuminating rockets. The illuminating cartridge is fired from a pistol, and for a second all is bright as day. As all that kind of work was done by sappers the French hated the sappers especially, and French prisoners often told us that German prisoners with white buttons and black ribbons on their caps (sappers) would be treated without any mercy. Warned by the statements of those prisoners nearly all provided themselves with infantry uniforms. We knew that we had gradually become some specialty in the trenches.

If the infantry were molested somewhere by the enemy's hand-grenades they used to come running up to us and begged us to go and meet the attack. Each of us received a cigar to light the hand-gre-

nades, and then we were off. Ten or twenty of us rained hand-grenades on the enemy's trench for hours, until one's arm got too stiff to throw.

Thus the slaughter continued, day after day, night after night. We had forty-eight hours in the trenches and twelve hours' sleep. It was found impossible to divide the time differently, for we were too few. The whole of the forest had been shot and torn to tatters. The artillery was everywhere, and kept the villages behind the enemy's position under fire. Once one of the many batteries which we always passed on our way from camp to the Front was just firing when we came by. I interrogated one of the sighting gunners what their target might be. "Some village or other," the gunner replied. The representative of the leader of the battery, a lieutenant-colonel, was present. One of my mates inquired whether women and children might not be in the villages. "That's neither here nor there," said the lieutenant-colonel, "the women and children are French, too, so what's the harm done? Even their litter must be annihilated so as to knock out of that nation for a hundred years any idea of war."

If that "gentleman" thought to win applause he was mistaken. We went our way, leaving him to his "enjoyment."

On that day an assault on the enemy's position

had been ordered, and we had to be in our places at seven o'clock in the morning. The 67th Regiment was to attack punctually at half-past eight, the sappers taking the lead. The latter had been provided with hand-grenades for that purpose. We were only some twenty yards away from the enemy. Those attacks, which were repeated every week, were prepared by artillery fire half an hour before the assault began. The artillery had to calculate their fire very carefully, because the distance between the trench and that of the enemy was very small. That distance varied from three to a hundred yards, it was nowhere more than that. At our place it was twenty yards. Punctually at eight o'clock the artillery began to thunder forth. The first three shots struck our own trench, but those following squarely hit the mark, i.e. the French trench. The artillery had got the exact range and then the volleys of whole batteries began to scream above our heads. Every time the enemy's trench or the roads leading to it were hit with wonderful accuracy. One could hear the wounded cry, a sign that many a one had already been crippled. An artillery officer made observations in the first trench and directed the fire by telephone.

The artillery became silent exactly at half-past eight, and we passed to the assault. But the 11th

Company of Regiment No. 67, of which I spoke before, found itself in such a violent machine-gun fire that eighteen men had been killed a few paces from our trench. The dead and wounded had got entangled in the wild jumble of the trees and branches encumbering the ground. Whoever could run tried to reach the enemy's trench as quickly as possible. Some of the enemy defended themselves desperately in their trench, which was filled with mud and water, and violent hand-to-hand fighting ensued. We stood in the water up to our knees, killing the rest of our opponents. Seriously wounded men were lying flat in the mud with only their mouths and noses showing above the water. But what did we care! They were stamped deeper in the mud, for we could not see where we were stepping; and so we rolled up the whole trench. Thereupon the conquered position was fortified as well as it could be done in all haste. Again we had won a few yards of the Argonne at the price of many lives. That trench had changed its owners innumerable times before, a matter of course in the Argonne, and we awaited the usual counter-attack.

Presently the "mules" began to get active. "Mules" are the guns of the French mountain artillery. As those guns are drawn by mules, the soldier in the Argonne calls them "mules" for

short. They are very light guns with a flat trajectory, and are fired from a distance of only fifty to a hundred yards behind the French Front. The shells of those guns whistled above our heads. Cutting their way through the branches, they fly along with lightning rapidity to explode in or above some trench. In consequence of the rapid flight and the short distance the noise of the firing and the explosion almost unite in a single bang. Those " mules " are much feared by the German soldiers, because those guns are active day and night. Thus day by day we lived through the same misery.

XIX

CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES

WINTER had arrived and it was icy cold. The trenches, all of which had underground water, had been turned into mere mud-holes. The cold at night was intense, and we had to do forty-eight hours' work with twelve hours' sleep. Each week we had to make an attack, the result of which was in no proportion to the immense losses. During the entire four months that I was in the Argonne we had a gain of terrain some four hundred yards deep. The following fact will show the high price that was paid in human life for that little piece of France. All the regiments (some of these were the Infantry Regiments Nos. 145, 67, 173, and the Hirschberg Sharpshooting Battalion No. 5) had their own cemetery. When we were relieved in the Argonne there were more dead in our cemetery than our regiment counted men. The 67th Regiment had buried more than 2000 men in its cemetery, all of whom, with the exception of a few sappers, had belonged to Regiment No. 67. Not a day

passed without the loss of human lives, and on a "storming day" death had an extraordinarily rich harvest. Each day had its victims, sometimes more, sometimes fewer. It must appear quite natural that under such conditions the soldiers were not in the best of moods. The men were all completely stupefied. Just as they formerly went to work regularly to feed the wife and children they now went to the trenches in just the same regular way. That business of slaughtering and working had become an every day affair. When they conversed it was always the army leaders, the Crown Prince and Lieutenant-General von Mudra, the general in command of the 16th Army Corps, who were most criticised.

The troops in the Argonne belonged to the 16th Army Corps, to the 33rd and 34th Divisions of Infantry. Neither of the two leaders, neither the Crown Prince nor von Mudra, have I ever seen in the trenches. The staff of the Crown Prince had among its members the old General Field-Marshal Count von Haeseler, the former commander of the 16th Army Corps, a man who in times of peace was already known as a relentless slave-driver. The "triplets," as we called the trio, the Crown Prince, von Mudra and Count von Haeseler, were more hated by most of the soldiers than the Frenchman who was out with his gun to take our miserable lives.

Many miles behind the Front the scion of the Hohenzollerns found no difficulty in spouting his "knock them hard!" and, at the price of thousands of human lives, in making himself popular with the patriots at home, who were sitting there behind the snug stove or at the beer table complaining that we did not advance fast enough. Von Mudra got the order "Pour le merite"; they did not think of his soldiers, who had not seen a bed nor taken off their trousers or boots for months; these were provided with food—and shells, and were being almost eaten up with vermin.

That we were covered with body lice was not to be wondered at, for we had scarcely enough water for drinking purposes, and could not think of having a wash. We had worn our clothes for months without changing them; the hair on our heads and our beards had grown to great length. When we had some hours in which to rest, the lice would not let us sleep.

The air in the shelters was downright pestiferous, and to that foul stench of perspiration and putrefaction was added the plague of lice. At times one was sitting up for hours and could not sleep, though one was dead tired. One could catch lice, and the more one caught the worse they got. We were urgently in want of sleep, but it was impossible to close the eyes on account of the vermin. We led

a loathsome, pitiful life, and at times we said to one another that nobody at home even suspected the condition we were in. We often told one another that if later on we should relate to our families the facts as they really were they would not believe them. Many soldiers tried to put our daily experience in verse.

There were many of such jingles illustrating our barbarous handicraft.

It was in the month of December and the weather was extremely cold. At times we often stood in the trenches with the mud running into our trousers pockets. In those icy cold nights we used to sit in the trenches almost frozen to a lump of ice, and when utter exhaustion sometimes vanquished us and put us to sleep we found our boots frozen to the ground on waking up. Quite a number of soldiers suffered from frost-bitten limbs; it was mostly their toes that were frost-bitten. They had to be taken to the hospital. The soldiers on duty fired incessantly so as to keep their fingers warm.

Not all the soldiers are as a rule kept ready to give battle. If no attack is expected or intended, only sentries occupy the trench. About three yards apart a man is posted behind his protective shield of steel. Nevertheless all the men are in the trench. The sentries keep their section under

a continual fire, especially when it is cold and dark. The fingers get warm when one pulls the trigger. Of course one cannot aim in the darkness, and the shots are fired at random. The sentry sweeps his section so that no hostile patrol can approach, for he is never safe in that thicket. Thus it happens that the firing is generally more violent at night than during the day; but there is never an interval. The rifles are fired continually: the bullets keep whistling above our trench and patter against the branches. The mines, too, come flying over at night, dropping at a high angle. Everybody knows the scarcely audible thud, and knows at once that it is a mine without seeing anything. He warns the others by calling out, "Mine coming!" and everybody looks in the darkness for the "glow-worm," i.e. the burning fuse of the mine. The glowing fuse betrays the direction of the mine, and there are always a few short seconds left to get round some corner. The same is the case with the hand-grenades. They, too, betray the line of their flight at night by their burning fuse. If they do not happen to arrive in too great numbers one mostly succeeds in getting out of their way. In daylight that is not so hard because one can overlook everything. It often happens that one cannot save oneself in time from the approaching hand-grenade. In that case there are only

two alternatives—to remain alive or be torn to atoms. Should a hand-grenade suddenly fall before one's feet one picks it up without hesitation as swiftly as possible and throws it away, if possible back into the enemy's trench. Often, however, the fuse is of such a length that the grenade does not even explode after reaching the enemy's trench again, and the Frenchman throws it back again with fabulous celerity. In order to avoid the danger of having a grenade returned the fuse is made as short as possible, and yet a grenade will come back now and again in spite of all. To return a grenade is of course dangerous work, but a man has no great choice ; if he leaves the grenade where it drops he is lost, as he cannot run away ; and he knows he will be crushed to atoms, and thus his only chance is to pick up the grenade and throw it away even at the risk of having the bomb explode in his hand. I know of hand-grenades thrown by the French that flew hither and thither several times. One was thrown by the French and immediately returned ; it came back again in an instant, and again we threw it over to them ; it did not reach the enemy's trench that time, but exploded in the air.

Though in general the infantry bullets cannot do much damage while one is in the trench, it happens daily that men are killed by ricochet bullets. The

thousands of bullets that cut through the air every minute all pass above our heads. But some strike a tree or branch and glance off. If in that case they hit a man in the trench they cause terrible injuries, because they do not strike with their heads but lengthwise. Whenever we heard of dumdum bullets we thought of those ricochet bullets, though we did not doubt that there were dumdum bullets in existence. I doubt, however, if dumdum bullets are manufactured in factories, for the following reasons: first, because a dumdum bullet can easily damage the barrel of a rifle and make it useless; secondly, because the average soldier would refuse to carry such ammunition, for if a man is captured and such bullets are found on him, the enemy in whose power he is would punish him by the laws of war as pitilessly as such an inhuman practice deserves to be punished. Generally, of course, a soldier only executes his orders.

However, there exist dumdum bullets, as I mentioned before. They are manufactured by the soldiers themselves. If the point is filed or cut off a German infantry bullet, so that the nickel case is cut through and the lead core is laid bare, the bullet explodes when striking or penetrating an object; should a man be hit in the upper arm by such a projectile, the latter, by its explosive force,

can mangle the arm to such an extent that it only hangs by a piece of skin.

Christmas came along, and we still found ourselves at the same place without any hope of a change. We received all kinds of gifts from our relations at home and other people. We were at last able to change our underwear, which we had worn for months.

Christmas in the trenches! It was bitterly cold. We had procured a pine-tree, for there were no fir-trees to be had. We had decorated the tree with candles and cookies, and had imitated the snow with wadding.

Christmas trees were burning everywhere in the trenches, and at midnight all the trees were lifted on to the parapet with their burning candles, and along the whole line German soldiers began to sing Christmas songs in chorus. "O thou blissful, O thou joyous, mercy-bringing Christmas time!" Hundreds of men were singing the song in that fearful wood. Not a shot was fired; the French had ceased firing along the whole line. That night I was with a company that was only five paces away from the enemy. The Christmas candles were burning brightly, and were renewed again and again. For the first time we heard no shots. From everywhere, throughout the forest, one could hear powerful carols come floating over—"Peace on earth——"

The French left their trenches and stood on the parapet without any fear. There they stood, quite overpowered by emotion, and all of them with cap in hand. We, too, had issued from our trenches. We exchanged gifts with the French—chocolate, cigarettes, etc. They were all laughing, and so were we ; why, we did not know. Then everybody went back to his trench, and incessantly the carol resounded, ever more solemnly, ever more longingly —" O thou blissful——"

All around silence reigned ; even the murdered trees seemed to listen ; the charm continued, and one scarcely dared to speak. Why could it not always be as peaceful ? We thought and thought, we were as dreamers, and had forgotten everything about us. Suddenly a shot rang out ; then another one was fired somewhere. The spell was broken. All rushed to their rifles. A rolling fire. Our Christmas was over.

Again we took up our old existence. A young infantryman stood next to me. He tried to get out of the trench. I told him : " Stay here ; the French will shoot you to pieces." " I left a box of cigars up there, and must have it back." Another one told him to wait till things quieted down somewhat. " They won't hit me ; I have been here three months, and they never caught me yet." " As you wish ; go ahead ! "

Scarcely had he put his head above the parapet when he tumbled back. Part of his brain was sticking to my belt. His cap flew high up into the air. His skull was shattered. He was dead on the spot. His trials were over. The cigars were later on fetched by another man.

On Christmas Day an army order was read out. We were forbidden to wear or have in our possession things of French origin; for every soldier who was found in possession of such things would be put before a court-martial as a marauder by the French if they captured him. We were forbidden to use objects captured from the French, and we were especially forbidden to make use of woollen blankets, because the French were infected with scabies. Scabies is an itching skin disease, which it takes at least a week to cure. But the order had a contrary effect. If one was the owner of such an "itch-blanket" one had a chance of getting into the hospital for some days. The illness was not of a serious nature, and one was at least safe from bullets for a few days. Every day soldiers were sent to the hospital, and we, too, were watching for a chance to grab such a French blanket. What did a man care if he could only get out of that hell!

XX

THE " ITCH "—A SAVIOUR

On January 5 the Germans attacked along the whole forest front, and took more than 1800 prisoners. We alone had captured 700 men of the French Infantry Regiment No. 120. The hand-to-hand fighting lasted till six o'clock at night. On that day I, together with another sapper, got into a trench section that was still being defended by eight Frenchmen. We could not back out, so we had to take up the unequal struggle. Fortunately we were well provided with hand-grenades. We cut the fuses so short that they exploded at the earliest moment. I threw one in the midst of the eight Frenchmen. They had scarcely escaped the first one when the second arrived, into which they ran. We utilised their momentary confusion by throwing five more in quick succession. We had reduced our opponents to four. Then we opened a rifle-fire, creeping closer and closer up to them. Their bullets kept whistling above our heads. One of the Frenchmen was shot in the mouth;

three more were left. These turned to flee. In such moments one is seized with an indescribable rage and forgets all about the danger that surrounds one. We had come quite near to them, when the last one stumbled and fell forward on his face. In a trice I was on him; he fought desperately with his fists; my mate was following the other two. I kept on wrestling with my opponent. He was bleeding from his mouth; I had knocked out some of his teeth. Then he surrendered and raised his hands. I let go and then had a good look at him. He was some thirty-five years old, about ten years older than myself. I now felt sorry for him. He pointed to his wedding-ring, talking to me all the while. I understood what he wanted—he wanted to be kept alive. He handed me his bottle, inviting me to drink wine. He cried; maybe he thought of his wife and children. I pressed his hand, and he showed me his bleeding teeth. "You are a silly fellow," I told him; "you have been lucky. The few missing teeth don't matter. For you the slaughtering is finished; come along!" I was glad I had not killed him, and took him along myself so as to protect him from being ill-treated. When I handed him over he pressed my hand thankfully and laughed; he was happy to be safe. However bad the time he might have as prisoner he would be better off at

any rate than in the trenches. At least he had a chance of getting home again.

In the evening we took some of the forbidden blankets, hundreds of which we had captured that day. Ten of us were lying in a shelter, all provided with blankets. Everybody wanted to get the "itch," however strange that may sound. We undressed and rolled ourselves in those blankets. Twenty-four hours later little red pimples showed themselves all over the body, and twelve men reported sick. The blankets were used in the whole company, but all of them had not the desired effect. The doctor sent nine of us to the hospital at Montmédy, and that very evening we left the camp in high glee. The railway depot at Apremont had been badly shelled; the next station was Châtel. Both places are a little more than three miles behind the Front. At Apremont the prisoners were divided into sections. Some of the prisoners had their homes at Apremont. Their families were still occupying their houses, and the prisoners asked to be allowed to pay them a visit. I chanced to observe one of those meetings at Apremont. Two men of the Landsturm led one of the prisoners to the house which he pointed out to them as his own. The young wife of the prisoner was sitting in the kitchen with her three children. We followed the men into the house. The woman

became as white as a sheet when she beheld her husband suddenly. They rushed to meet each other and fell into each other's arms. We went out, for we felt that we were not wanted. The wife had not been able to get the slightest signs from her husband for the last five months, for the German forces had been between her and him. He, on the other hand, had been in the trench for months knowing that his wife and children must be there, on the other side, very near, yet not to be reached. He did not know whether they were alive or dead. He heard the French shells scream above his head. Would they hit Apremont? He wondered whether it was his own house that had been set alight by a shell and was reddening the sky at night. He did not know. The uncertainty tortured him, and life became hell. Now he was at home, though only for a few hours. He had to leave again a prisoner; but now he could send a letter to his wife by the field-post. He had to take leave. She had nothing she could give him—no underwear, no food, absolutely nothing. She had lost all and had to rely on the charity of the soldiers. She handed him her last money, but he returned it. We could not understand what they told each other. She took the money back; it was German money, five and ten pfennig pieces and some coppers—her whole

belongings. We could no longer contain ourselves, and made a collection there and then. We got more than ten marks together, which we gave to the young woman. At first she refused to take it and looked at her husband. Then she took it and wanted to kiss our hands. We warded her off, and she ran to the nearest canteen and bought things. Returning with cigars, tobacco, matches, and sausage, she handed all over to her husband with a radiant face. She laughed, once again perhaps in a long time, and sent us grateful looks. The children clung round their father and kissed him again and again. She accompanied her husband, who carried two of the kiddies, one on each arm, while his wife carried the third child. Beaming with happiness the family marched along between the two Landsturm men, who had their bayonets fixed. When they had to take leave, all of them, parents and children, began to weep. She knew that her husband was no longer in constant danger, and she was happy, for though she had lost much, she still had her most precious possessions.

Thousands of poor men and women have met such a fate near their homes.

Regular trains left Châtel. We quitted the place at eleven o'clock at night, heartily glad to leave the Argonne behind us. We had to change trains at Vouziers, and proceeded on our way to

Sedan. There we saw twelve soldiers with fixed bayonets take along three Frenchmen. They were elderly men in civilian dress. We had no idea what it signified, so we entered into a conversation with one of our fellow-travellers. He was a merchant, a Frenchman living at Vouziers, and spoke German fluently. The merchant was on a business trip to Sedan, and told us that the three civilian prisoners were citizens of his town. He said: "We obtain our means of life from the German military authorities, but mostly we do not receive enough to live, and the people have nothing left of their own; all the cattle and food have been commandeered. Those three men refused to keep on working for the military authorities, because they could not live on the things they were given. They were arrested and are now being transported to Germany. Of course we don't know what will happen to them."

The man also told us that all the young men had been taken away by the Germans; all of them had been interned in Germany.

At Sedan we had to wait for five hours; for hospital trains were constantly arriving. It was two o'clock in the afternoon of the following day when we reached Montmédy, where we went to the hospital. There all our clothes were disinfected in the "unlousing establishment," and we could take

a proper bath. We were lodged in the large barracks. There one met people from all parts of the Front, and all of them had only known the same misery; there was not one among them who did not curse this war. All of them were glad to be in safety, and all of them tried their best to be "sick" as long as possible. Each day we were twice treated with ointment; otherwise we were at liberty to walk about the place.

One day we paid a visit to the fortress of Montmédy high up on a hill. Several hundreds of prisoners were just being fed there. They were standing about in the yard of the fortress and were eating their soup. One of the prisoners came straight up to me. I had not noticed him particularly, and recognised him only when he stood before me. He was the man I had struggled with on January 5, and we greeted each other cordially. He had brought along a prisoner who spoke German well and who interpreted for us all we had to say to each other. He had seen me standing about and had recognised me at once. Again and again he told me how glad he was to be a prisoner. Like myself he was a soldier because he had to be, and not from choice. At that time we had fought with each other in blind rage; for a moment we had been deadly enemies. I felt happy at having stayed my fury at that time and again I became aware

of the utter idiocy of that barbarous slaughter. We separated with a firm handshake.

I remained a fortnight at the hospital; then I had to return to the Front. We had been treated well at the hospital, so we started on our return journey with mixed feelings. As soon as we arrived at Châtel, the terminus, we heard the incessant gun-fire. It was no use kicking, we had to go into the forest again. When we reached our old camp, we found that different troops were occupying it. Our company had left, nobody knew for what destination. Wherever we asked, nobody could give us any information. So we had to go back to the command of our corps, the headquarters of which were at Cornay at that time. We left Châtel again by a hospital train, and reached Cornay after half-an-hour's journey. Cornay harboured the General Staff of the 16th Army Corps, and we thought they surely ought to know where our company was. General von Mudra and his officers had taken up their quarters in a large villa. The house was guarded by three double sentries. We showed our pay-books and hospital certificates, and an orderly led us to a spacious room. It was the telephone room. There the wires from all the divisional Fronts ran together, and the apparatus was in constant use. A sergeant-major looked into the lists and upon the maps. In two minutes

he had found our company. He showed us on the map where it was fighting and where its camp was. "The camp is at the northern end of Varennes," he said, "and the company belongs to the 34th Division; formerly it was part of the 33rd. The position it is in is in the villages of Vauquois and Boureuilles." Then he explained to us on the map the direction we were to take, and we could trot off. We returned by rail to Châtel, and went on foot from there to Apremont. We spent the night in the half-destroyed depot of Apremont. In order to get to Varennes we had to march to the south. On our way we saw French prisoners mending the roads. Most of them were black colonial troops in picturesque uniforms. On that road Austrian motor batteries were posted. Three of those 30·5-cm. howitzers were standing behind a rocky slope, but did not fire. When at noon we reached the height of Varennes we saw the whole wide plan in front of us. Varennes itself was immediately in front of us in the valley. A little farther up on the heights was Vauquois. No houses were to be seen; one could only notice a heap of rubbish through the field-glasses. Shells kept exploding in that rubbish-heap continually, and we felt a cold sweat run down our backs at the thought that the place up there was our destination. We had scarcely passed the ridge when some shells exploded

behind us. At that place the French were shooting with artillery at individuals. As long as Vauquois had been in their power they had been able to survey the whole country, and we comprehended why that heap of rubbish was so bitterly fought for. We ran down the slope and found ourselves in Varennes. The southern portion of the village had been shelled to pieces and gutted. Only most of the chimneys, which were built apart from the bottom upward, had remained standing, thin blackened forms rising out of the ruins into the air. Everywhere we saw groups of soldiers collecting the remaining more expensive metals, which were sent to Germany. Among other things church bells melted into shapeless lumps were also loaded on wagons and taken away. All the copper, brass, tin, and lead that could be got was collected.

XXI

IN THE HELL OF VAUQUOIS

We soon found our company, and our comrades told us what hell they had got into. The next morning our turn came too. We had to reach the position before daybreak, for as soon as it got light the French kept all approaches under constant fire. There was no trace of trenches at Vauquois. All that could be seen were pieces of stones. Literally not one stone remained on another at Vauquois. That heap of ruins, once a village, had changed hands no less than fifteen times. When we arrived half of the place was in the possession of the Germans. But the French dominated the highest point, whence they could survey the whole country for many miles around. In the absence of a trench we sought cover behind stones, for it was absolutely impossible to construct trenches; the artillery was shooting everything to pieces.

Thus the soldiers squatted behind piles of stones and fired as fast as their rifles would allow. Guns

of all sizes were bombarding the village incessantly. There was an army of corpses, Frenchmen and Germans, all lying about pell-mell. At first we thought that that terrible state of things was only temporary, but after a few days we recognised that a slaughter worse than madness was a continuous state of things at that place. Day and night, ever the same. With Verdun as a base of operations the French continually brought up fresh masses of troops. They had carried along a field-railway the heavy pieces of the neighbouring forts of Verdun, and in the spring of 1915 an offensive of a local but murderous kind was begun. The artillery of both sides bombarded the place to such an extent that not a foot of ground could be found that was not torn up by shells. Thousands upon thousands of shells of all sizes were employed. The bombardment from both sides lasted three days and three nights, until at last not a soldier, neither French nor German, was left in the village. Both sides had been obliged to retreat before the infernal fire of the opponent, for not a man would have escaped alive out of that inferno. The whole slope and height were veiled in an impenetrable smoke. In the evening of the third day the enemy's bombardment died down a little, and we were ordered to go forward again into the shell-torn ruins. It was not yet quite dark when the French advanced in close order.

We were in possession of almost the whole of the village, and had placed one machine-gun next to the other. We could see the projectiles of the artillery burst in great numbers among the reserves of the attackers. Our machine-guns literally mowed down the first ranks. Five times the French renewed their attack during that night, their artillery meanwhile making great gaps in our ranks. We soldiers calculated that the two sides together had some three or four thousand men killed in that one night. Next morning the French eased their attacks, and their guns treated us again to the accustomed drum-fire. We stood it until ten o'clock in the morning ; then we retreated again without awaiting orders, leaving innumerable dead men behind. Again the French advanced in the face of a violent German artillery-fire, and effected a lodgment at the northern edge of the village of Vauquois that used to be. A few piles of stones was all that still belonged to us. We managed to put a few stones before us as a protection. The guns of neither side could hurt us or them, for they, the enemy, were but ten paces away. But the country behind us was ploughed by projectiles. In face of the machine-gun fire it was found impossible to bring up ammunition.

The sappers undid the coils of rope worn round their bodies, and three men or more crept back

with them. One of them was killed; the others arrived safely and attached the packets of cartridges to the rope. Thus we brought up the ammunition by means of a rope running in a circle, until we had enough or till the rope was shot through. At three o'clock in the afternoon we attacked again, but found it impossible to rise from the ground on account of the hail of bullets. Everybody was shouting, "Sappers to the front with hand-grenades!" Not a sapper stirred. We are only human after all.

A sergeant-major of the infantry came creeping up. He looked as if demented, his eyes were bloodshot. "You're a sapper?" "Yes." "Advance!" "Alone?" "We're coming along!" We had to roar at each other in order to make ourselves understood in the deafening, confounded row. Another sapper lay beside me. When the sergeant-major saw that he could do nothing with me he turned to the other fellow. That man motioned to him to desist, but the sergeant-major got ever more insistent, until the sapper showed him his dagger, and then our superior slung his hook. Some twenty hand-grenades were lying in front of us. Ten of them I attached to my belt for any emergency. I said to myself that if all of them exploded there would not be much left of me. I had a lighted cigar in my mouth. I lit one bomb

after the other and threw them over to some Frenchmen who were working a machine-gun in front of me, behind a heap of stones. All around me the bullets of the machine-guns were splitting the stones. I had already thrown four grenades, but all of them had overshot the mark. I took some stones and threw them to find out how far I would have to throw in order to hit the fire-spitting machine in front. My aim got more accurate each time until I hit the barrel of the gun. "If it had only been a hand-grenade," I thought. An infantryman close to me was shot through the shell of one ear, half of which was cut in pieces; the blood was streaming down his neck. I had no more material for bandaging except some wadding, which I attached to his wound. In my pocket I had a roll of insulating ribbon, rubber used to insulate wires; with that I bandaged him. He pointed to the machine-gun. Thereupon I gave him my cigar, telling him to keep it well alight so as to make the fuse which I desired to light by it burn well. In quick succession I threw six hand-grenades. I don't know how many of them took effect, but the rags of uniforms flying about and a demolished machine-gun said enough. When we advanced later on I observed three dead men lying round the machine-gun.

That was only one example of the usual, daily

occurrences that happen day and night, again and again and everywhere, and the immense number of such actions of individual soldiers makes the enormous loss of human life comprehensible.

We were still lying there without proceeding to the attack. Again ammunition was brought up by ropes from the rear. A hand-grenade duel ensued; hundreds of hand-grenades were thrown by both sides. Things could not go on long like that; we felt that something was bound to happen. Without receiving an order, and yet as if by command, we all jumped up and advanced with the dagger in our hands right through the murderous fire, and engaged in the maddest hand-to-hand fighting. The daggers, sharp as razors, were plunged into head after head, chest after chest. One stood on corpses in order to make other men corpses. New enemies came running up. One had scarcely finished with one when three more appeared on the scene.

We, too, got reinforcements. One continued to murder and expected to be struck down oneself the next moment. One did not care a cent for one's life, but fought like an animal. I stumbled and fell on the stones. At that very moment I caught sight of a gigantic Frenchman before me who was on the point of bringing his sapper's spade down on me. I moved aside with lightning speed,

and the blow fell upon the stone. In a moment my dagger was in his stomach more than up to the hilt. He went down with a horrible cry, rolling in his blood in maddening pain. I put the bloody dagger back in my boot and took hold of the spade. All around me I beheld new enemies. The spade I found to be a handy weapon. I hit one opponent between head and shoulder. The sharp spade went half-way through the body; I heard the cracking of the bones that were struck. Another enemy was close to me. I dropped the spade and took hold of my dagger again. All happened as in a flash. My opponent struck me in the face, and the blood came pouring out of my mouth and nose. We began to wrestle with each other. I had the dagger in my right hand. We had taken hold of each other round the chest. He was no stronger than myself, but he held me as firmly as I held him. We tried to fight each other with our teeth. I had the dagger in my hand, but could not strike. Who was it to be? He or I? One of us two was sure to go down. I got the dagger in such a position that its point rested on his back. Then I pressed his trembling body still more firmly to myself. He fastened his teeth in my shaggy beard, and I felt a terrible pain. I pressed him still more firmly so that his ribs almost began to crack and, summoning all my strength, I pushed the dagger

into the right side of his back, just below the shoulder-blade. In frightful pain he turned himself round several times, fell on his face, and lay groaning on the ground. I withdrew my dagger; he bled to death like many thousands.

We had pushed back the French for some yards when we received strong assistance. After a short fight the enemy turned and fled, and we followed him as far as the southern edge of the village. There the French made a counter-attack with fresh bodies of men and threw us back again for some fifty yards. Then the attack was halted, and we found ourselves again where we had been at the beginning of that four days' slaughter. Thousands of corpses were covering the ruins of Vauquois, all sacrificed in vain.

XXII

SENT ON FURLOUGH

For four days and nights, without food and sleep, we had been raging like barbarians, and had spent all our strength. We were soon relieved. To our astonishment we were relieved by cavalry. They were Saxon chasseurs on horseback, who were to do duty as infantrymen. It had been found impossible to make good the enormous losses of the preceding days by sending up men of the depot. So they had called upon the cavalry, who, by the way, were frequently employed during that time. The soldiers who had been in a life-and-death struggle for four days were demoralised to such an extent that they no longer had any fighting value. We were relieved very quietly, and could then return to our camp. We did not hear before the next day that during the period described our company had suffered a total loss of forty-nine men. The fate of most of them was unknown ; one did not know whether they were dead or prisoners or whether they lay wounded in some ambulance station.

The village of Varennes was continually bombarded by French guns of large size. Several French families were still living in a part of the village that had not been so badly damaged. Every day several of the enemy's 28-cm. shells came down in that quarter. Though many inhabitants had been wounded by the shells the people could not be induced to leave their houses.

Our quarters were situated near a very steep slope, and were thus protected against artillery-fire. They consisted of wooden shanties built by ourselves. We had brought up furniture from everywhere and had made ourselves at home; for Varennes was, after all, nearly two miles behind the Front. But all the shanties were not occupied, for the number of our men diminished from day to day. At last the longed-for men from the depot arrived. Many new sapper formations had to be got together for all parts of the Front, and it was therefore impossible to supply the existing sapper detachments with their regular reserves. Joyfully we greeted the new arrivals. They were, as was always the case, men of very different ages; a young boyish volunteer of seventeen years would march next to an old man of the Landsturm who had likewise volunteered. All of them, without any exception, have bitterly repented of their "free choice" and made no secret of it. "It's a shame,"

a comrade told me, " that those seventeen-year-old children should be led to the slaughter, and that their young life is being poisoned, as it needs must be, in these surroundings; scarcely out of boyhood they are being shot down like mad dogs."

It took but a few days for the volunteers—all of them without an exception—to repent bitterly of their resolve, and every soldier who had been in the war for any length of time would reproach them when they gave expression to their great disappointment. " But you have come voluntarily," they were told; " we had to go, else we should have been off long ago." Yet we knew that all those young people had been under some influence and had been given a wrong picture of the war.

Those soldiers who had been in the war from the start who had not been wounded, but had gone through all the fighting, were gradually all sent home on furlough for ten days. Though our company contained but fourteen unwounded soldiers it was very hard to obtain the furlough. We had lost several times the number of men on our muster-roll, but all our officers were still in good physical condition.

It was not until September that I managed to obtain furlough at the request of my relations, and I left for home with a resolve that at times

seemed to me impossible to execute. All went well until I got to Diedenhofen.

As far as that station the railways are operated by the army authorities. At Diedenhofen they are taken over by the Imperial Railways of Alsace-Lorraine and the Prusso-Hessian State Railway. So I had to change, and got on a train that went to Saarbrücken. I had scarcely taken a seat in a compartment in my dirty and ragged uniform when a conductor came along to inspect the tickets. Of course I had no ticket; I had only a furlough certificate and a pass which had been handed to me at the field-railway depot of Châtel. The conductor looked at the papers and asked me again for my ticket. I drew his attention to my pass. "That is only good for the territory of the war operations," he said; "you are now travelling on a State railway and have to buy a ticket."

I told him that I should not buy a ticket, and asked him to inform the station-master. "You," I told him, "only act according to instructions. I am not angry with you for asking me what I shall do, under the circumstances." He went off and came back with the station-master. The latter also inspected my papers and told me I had to pay for the journey. "I have no means for that purpose," I told him. "For these last three years I have been in these clothes" (I pointed to

my uniform), " and for three years I have therefore been without any income. Whence am I to get the money to pay for this journey ? " " If you have no money for travelling you can't take furlough." I thought to myself that if they took me deep into France they were in conscience bound to take me back to where they had brought me from. Was I to be a soldier for three years and fight for the " Fatherland " for more than a year only to find that now they refused the free use of their railways to a ragged soldier ? I explained that I was not going to pay, that I could not save the fare from the few pfennigs' pay. I refused explicitly to pay a soldier's journey with my private money, even if —as was the case here—that soldier was myself. Finally I told him, " I must request you to inform the military railway commander; the depot command attends to soldiers, not you." He sent me a furious look through his horn spectacles and disappeared. Two civilians were sitting in the same compartment with me; they thought it an unheard-of thing that a soldier coming from the Front should be asked for his fare. Presently the depot commander came up with a sergeant. He demanded to see my furlough certificate, pay-books, and all my other papers.

" Have you any money ? "

" No."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Châtel in the Argonne."

"How long were you at the Front?"

"Nearly fourteen months."

"Been wounded?"

"No."

"Have you no money at all?"

"No; you don't want money at the Front."

"The fare must be paid. If you can't, the company must pay. Please sign this paper."

I signed it without looking at it. It was all one to me what I signed, as long as they left me alone. Then the sergeant came back.

"You cannot travel in that compartment; you must also not converse with travellers. You have to take the first carriage marked 'Only for the military.' Get into that."

"I see," I observed; "in the dogs' compartment."

He turned round again and said, "Cut out those remarks."

The train started, and I arrived safely home. After the first hours of meeting all at home again had passed I found myself provided with faultless underwear and had taken the urgently needed bath. Once more I could put on the civilian dress I had missed for so long a time. All of it appeared strange to me. I began to think. Under no conditions was I going to return to the Front.

But I did not know how I should succeed in getting across the frontier. I could choose between two countries only—Switzerland and Holland. It was no use going to Switzerland, for that country was surrounded by belligerent States, and it needed only a little spark to bring Switzerland into the war, and then there would be no loophole for me. There was only the nearest country left for me to choose—Holland. But how was I to get there? There was the rub. I concocted a thousand plans and discarded them again. Nobody, not even my relatives, must know about it.

XXIII

THE FLIGHT TO HOLLAND

My furlough soon neared its end ; there were only four days left. I remembered a good old friend in a Rhenish town. My plan was made. Without my family noticing it I packed a suit, boots, and all necessities, and told them at home that I was going to visit my friend. To him I revealed my intentions, and he was ready to help me in every possible manner.

My furlough was over. I put on my uniform, and my relations were left in the belief that I was returning to the Front. I went, however, to my friend and changed into civilian clothes. I destroyed my uniform and arms, throwing the lot into the river near-by. Thus, having destroyed all traces, I left, and arrived at Cologne after some criss-cross travelling. Thence I journeyed to Düsseldorf and stayed at night at an hotel. I had already overstayed my leave several days. Thousands of thoughts went through my brain. I was fully aware that I would lose my life if everything

did not come to pass according to my programme. I intended to cross the frontier near Venlo (Holland). I knew, however, that the frontier was closely guarded.

The country round Venlo and the course of the frontier in those parts were unknown to me; in fact, I was a complete stranger. I made another plan. I returned to my friend and told him that it was absolutely necessary for me to get to know the frontier district and to procure a map showing the terrain. I also informed him that I had to get hold of a false identification paper. He gave me a Landsturm certificate which was to identify me in case of need. In my note-book I drew the exact course of the frontier from a railway map, and then I departed again.

Dead tired, I reached Crefeld that night by the last train. I could not go on. So I went into the first hotel and hired a room. I wrote the name that was on the false paper into the register and went to sleep. At six o'clock in the morning there was a knock at my door.

"Who is there?"

"The police."

"The police?"

"Yes; the political police."

I opened the door.

"Here lives . . . ?" (he mentioned the name in which I had registered).

"Yes."

"Have you any identification papers?"

"If you please," I said, handing him the Landsturm certificate.

"Everything in order; pardon me for having disturbed you."

"You're welcome; you're welcome," I hastened to reply, and thought how polite the policeman was.

That well-known leaden weight fell from my chest, but I had no mind to go to sleep again. Whilst I was dressing I heard him visit all the guests of the hotel. I had not thought of the customary inspection of strangers in frontier towns. It was a good thing I had been armed for that event.

Without taking breakfast (my appetite had vanished) I went to the depot and risked travelling to Kempten in spite of the great number of policemen that were about. I calculated by the map that the frontier was still some fifteen miles away. I had not much baggage with me, only a small bag, a raincoat, and an umbrella. I marched along the country road and in five hours I reached the village of Herongen. To the left of that place was the village of Niederhofen. Everywhere I saw farmers working in the fields. They would have to inform me of how the line of the frontier ran and how it was being watched. In order to procure

that information I selected only those people who, to judge by their appearance, were no "great lights of the Church."

Without arousing suspicion I got to know that the names of the two places were "Herongen" and "Niederhofen," and that a troop of cuirassiers were quartered at Herongen. The man told me that the soldiers were lodged in the dancing-hall of the Schwarz Inn. Presently I met a man who was cutting a hedge. He was a Hollander who went home across the frontier every night; he had a passport. "You are the man for me," I thought to myself, and said aloud that I had met several Hollanders in that part of the country (he was the first one), and gave him a cigar. I mentioned to him that I had visited an acquaintance in the Schwarz Inn at Herongen.

"Yes," he said; "they are there."

"But my friend had to go on duty, so I am having a look round."

"They have got plenty to do near the frontier."

"Indeed?"

"Every thirty minutes and oftener a cavalry patrol, and every quarter of an hour an infantry patrol go scouting along the frontier."

"And how does the frontier run?" I queried, offering him a light for his cigar.

He showed me with his hand.

"Here in front of you, then right through the woods, then up there; those high steeples towering over the woods belong to the factories of Venlo."

I knew enough. After a few remarks I left him. All goes according to my programme, I thought. But there was a new undertaking before me. I had to venture close enough to the frontier to be able to watch the patrols without being seen by them. That I succeeded in doing during the following night.

I hid in the thick underwood; open country was in front of me. I remained at that spot for three days and nights. It rained, and at night it was very chilly. On the evening of the third day I resolved to execute my plan that night.

Regularly every fifteen minutes a patrol of from three to six soldiers arrived. When it had got dark I changed my place for one more to the right, some five hundred yards from the frontier. I said to myself that I would have to venture out as soon as it got a little lighter. In the darkness I could not see anything. It would have to be done in twilight. I had rolled my overcoat into a bundle to avoid making a noise against the trees. I advanced just after a patrol had passed. I went forward slowly and stepped out cautiously without making a noise. Then I walked with ever increasing rapidity. Suddenly a patrol appeared on my right. The

frontier was about three hundred yards away from me. The patrol had about two hundred yards to the point of the frontier nearest to me. Victory would fall to the best and swiftest runner. The patrol consisted of five men; they fired several times. That did not bother me. I threw everything away, and summoning all my strength I made in huge leaps for the frontier, which I passed like a whirlwind. I ran past the pointed frontier stone and stopped fifty yards away from it. I was quite out of breath, and an indescribable happy feeling took hold of me. I felt like crying into the world that at last I was free.

I seated myself on the stump of a tree and lit a cigar, quite steadily and slowly; for now I had time. Scarcely fifty yards away, near the frontier stone, was the disappointed patrol. I read on the side of the frontier stone facing me, "Koningrjk der Nederlanden" (Kingdom of the Netherlands). I had to laugh with joy. "Who are you?" one of the German patrol called to me. "The Hollanders have now the right to ask that question; you've got that right no longer, old fellow," I replied. They called me all manner of names, but that did not excite me. I asked them: "Why don't you throw me over my bag, which I threw away in my hurry? It contains some washing I brought along with me so as to get into a decent country like a decent man."

Attracted by that conversation, a Dutch patrol, a sergeant and three men, came up. The sergeant questioned me, and I told him all. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Be glad that you are here—wij Hollanders weuschen de vrede [we Hollanders wish for peace], and you are welcome here in hospitable Holland."

I had to go with the soldiers to their guard-room and take breakfast with them. Thereupon they showed me the nearest road to Venlo, where I arrived at seven o'clock in the morning. From Venlo I travelled to Rotterdam. I soon obtained a well-paid position and became a man again, a man who could live and not merely exist. Thousands upon thousands of Belgian refugees are living in Holland and are treated as the guests of the people. There are also great numbers of German deserters in Holland, where their number is estimated to be between fifteen and twenty thousand. Those deserters enjoy the full protection of the Dutch authorities.

I would never have thought of leaving that hospitable country with its fairly liberal constitution if the political sky had not been so overclouded in the month of March, 1916.

XXIV

AMERICA AND SAFETY

What I have still to relate does not concern actual war experiences. But the reader might want to know how I came to America. That must be done in a few short sentences.

In Holland war was believed to be unavoidable. Again I had to choose another domicile. After much reflection and making of plans I decided to go to America.

After having left my place I executed that plan. Some days after I was informed that the steamer *Zyldyk* of the Holland-America line was leaving for New York in the night from the 17th to the 18th of March. According to my plan I packed my things in a sailor's bundle and began the risky game.

I had never been on a sea-going steamer before. The boat was a small trader. I had found out that the crew had to be on board by midnight. I had an idea that the men would not turn up earlier than was necessary. With my sailor's bundle

I stood ready on the pier as early as ten o'clock. All I had packed together in the excitement consisted of about seven pounds of bread and a tin containing some ten quarts of water. At midnight the sailors and stokers of the boat arrived. Most of them were drunk and came tumbling along with their bundles on their backs. I mixed with the crowd and tumbled along with them. I reached the deck without being discovered. I observed next to me a deep black hole with an iron ladder leading downwards. I threw my bundle down that hole and climbed after it. All was dark. I groped my way to the coal bunker. I would have struck a match, but I dared not make a light. So I crawled on to the coal, which filled the space right up to the ceiling. Pushing my bundle in front of me I made my way through the coal, filling again the opening behind me with coal. Having in that manner worked my way some distance I came to a wall. There I pushed the coal aside so as to have room to lie down. I turned my back against the outer wall of the boat.

Nobody suspected in the slightest degree that I was on board. Now the journey can start, I thought to myself. At last the engines began to work; we were off. After many long hours the engines stopped. Now we are in England, I guessed. Perhaps we were off Dover or somewhere else;

I did not know. Everything was darkness down there. While the boat was stopping I heard the thunder of guns close to us. I had no idea what that might mean. I said to myself, "If the English find me my voyage is ended." But they did not turn up.

At last we proceeded; I did not know how long we had stopped. All went well; I scarcely felt the boat move. However, it was bitterly cold, and I noticed that the cold increased steadily. Then the weather became rougher and rougher. Days must have passed. I never knew whether it was day or night. Down in my place it was always night. I ate bread and drank water. But I had scarcely eaten when all came up again. Thus my stomach was always empty.

Through the rolling of the boat I was nearly buried by the coal. It got worse and worse, and I had to use all my strength to keep the coal away from me. The big lumps wounded me all about the head; I felt the blood run over my face. My store of bread was nearly finished, and the water tasted stale. I lit a match and saw that the bread was quite black.

I wondered whether we were nearly there. No more bread. I felt my strength leave me more and more. The boat went up and down, and I was thrown hither and thither for hours, for days.

I felt I could not stand it much longer. I wondered how long we had been on the water. I had no idea. I was awfully hungry. Days passed again. I noticed that I had become quite thin.

At last the engines stopped again. But soon we were off once more. After long, long hours the boat stopped. I listened. All was quiet. Then I heard the noise of the unloading cranes.

New York! . . . After a while I crept forth. I found that half of the coal had been taken away. Not a soul was there. Then I climbed down a ladder into the stokehole; nobody was there either. I noticed a pail and filled it with warm water. With it I hastened into a dark corner and washed myself. I was terribly tired and had to hold on to something so as not to collapse. When I had washed I took my pocket mirror and gazed at my face. My own face frightened me; for I looked pale as a sheet and like a bundle of skin and bones. I wondered how long the voyage had lasted. I had to laugh in spite of my misery—I had crossed the ocean and had never seen it!

The problem was now to get on land. What should I say if they caught me? I thought that if I were caught now I should simply say I wanted to get to Holland as a stowaway in order to reach Germany. In that case, I thought, they would quickly enough put me back on land. With firm

resolve I climbed on deck, which was full of workmen.

I noticed a stairway leading to the warehouse. Gathering all my strength I loitered up to it in a careless way and—two minutes later I had landed. I found myself in the street outside the warehouse.

Up to that time I had kept on my legs. But now my strength left me, and I dropped on the nearest steps.

It was only then that I became aware of the fact that I was not in New York, but in Philadelphia. It was five o'clock in the afternoon of April 5, 1916. I had reckoned on twelve days and the voyage had taken eighteen.

Physically a wreck, I became acquainted with native Americans in the evening. They afforded me every assistance that one human being can give to another. One of those most noble-minded humanitarians took me to New York. I could not leave my room for a week on account of the hardships I had undergone; I recovered only slowly.

But to-day I have recovered sufficiently to take up again in the ranks of the American Socialists the fight against capitalism, the extirpation of which must be the aim of every class-conscious worker. A relentless struggle to the bitter end is necessary to show the ruling war-provoking

capitalist caste who is the stronger, so that it no longer may be in the power of that class to provoke such a murderous war as that in which the working class of Europe is now bleeding to death.

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